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VOL. 4, NO. 1

MANHUNT

JANUARY, 1956

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CHAS. W. ADAMS, *Art Director* R. E. DECKER, *Business Manager*

MANHUNT VOLUME 4, NUMBER 1, January, 1956. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, $4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere $5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. (an affiliate of the St. John Publishing Co.), 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Entered as Second Class matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1955 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A.

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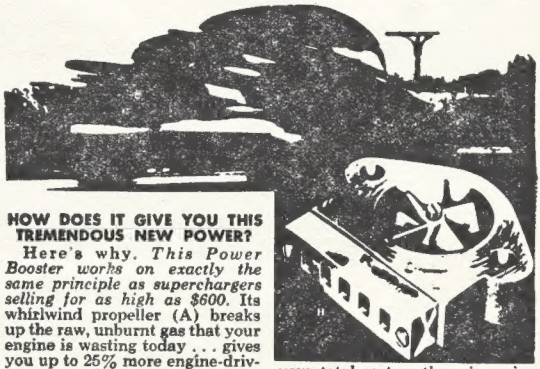

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Who Killed Helen?

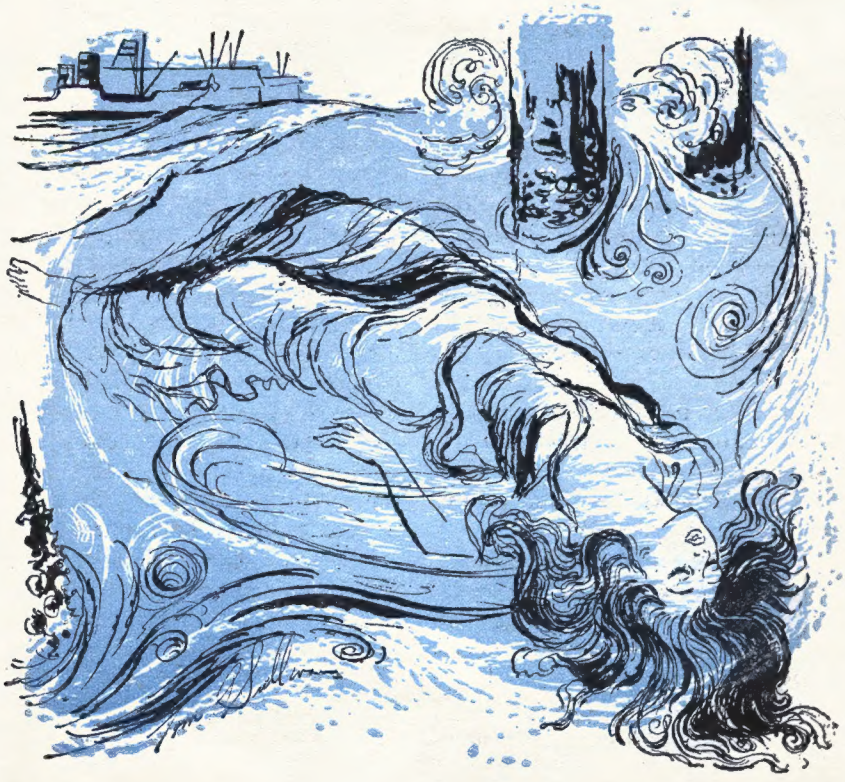
They were going to hit the top. They were going to be famous — even if they died for it.

BY BRYCE WALTON

HELEN'S FOOTSTEPS were heavy when she started up the stairs. But they got quicker and brighter and by the time she came into the room you could never tell she was all beat out from making the rounds all day.

"Hi, honey," she said, smiling. For her, success was always just around the next agent's office.

By then Jimmie had the bottle pushed under the couch. Not that Helen would have said anything.



Jimmie was tops with Helen no matter what. Jimmie hadn't shaved for two days, but she didn't care about that either.

She put the sack of groceries on the table, kicked off her shoes, zipped her skirt down the side, stepped out of it, took her blouse off and then sat down on Jimmie's lap. She hadn't wiped her lipstick off, so she stuck her tongue out for Jimmie to kiss because Jimmie hated lipstick smeared on his lips. He pressed her head into his chest and thought about how pretty she was and how nice it was to have someone like that to come home to him, warm and smiling and always full of optimism.

She didn't ask any questions either. Not even if he'd gone down to talk with Johnson about that possible part in the off-Broadway show Johnson was going to do. Johnson had liked something Jimmie did in a summer stock job on *The Glass Menagerie* three years back.

Jimmie stared past Helen's shiny black hair at the airshaft wall. It was the only window in the room and the airshaft wall was always the same dirty gray color.

He looked at the small bag of groceries she had brought in.

"What's for dinner, darling?" he asked. He tried to sound like he cared.

"Can of beans. A tomato. Couple of chops."

"Later, we'll have the boy bring in the champagne," Jimmie said.

She raised her face. She was beat all right. All day, pounding the agency offices, waiting in line for the kindly brush-off, being nice to producers in white oak offices. Girls were supposed to cry, but Helen hardly ever cried. Jimmie admired her for that. Especially at these moments when he knew she wanted to cry. "Don't you worry," she whispered. "We'll make it, Jimmie."

"Sure," Jimmie said.

But she looked a little doubtful this time, just a little. It scared Jimmie. What if she came in sometime saying maybe they ought to drop the ball? Jimmie could hear cold air rushing down the airshaft.

"Don't let it get you down, honey," she said. She squeezed his arm. "We've hit it five years and we can't drop out, and don't you ever forget it."

Jimmie knew she was saying it for him, to boost him up. Not for herself. She wanted to have babies, that was what Helen really wanted down deep, and he knew that, but she helped keep him going and later she could have babies. That was partly true anyway. Sure, she wanted to hit in the business too.

"We can't give up," Jimmie said. "Who the hell even mentioned it? You give up and that's what you'll think about the rest of your life. The other things wouldn't last. You'd be left with what you gave up. You can't live with that."

They had agreed that their careers

were first all the way. If Helen didn't get in until three in the morning, Jimmie never asked any questions, and vice versa. Nothing to interfere with the other's career. They had agreed that nothing succeeds like success.

Helen jumped up and opened the sack of groceries. "I've got to hurry, honey. I've got to rehearse a big part for Larry's show Saturday."

"What? What's that? Why didn't you tell me."

She also took the TV script out of her big leather handbag and put it on the table.

"Big part," she said. No lines. All pantomime."

"Well, tell me, the suspense is killing me!"

"This time all they see are my legs."

"What, again?"

They both managed to laugh. She had played a corpse on Larry's weekly whodunit three times already on the theory that Larry, being an old friend, would some day let Helen play a real live girl. Only letting Helen play a real live girl was evidently stretching friendship a little too far for Larry.

There were a lot of real live girls running around, and Larry knew them all. Few of them were really talented or as good looking as Helen was, but a lot of them weren't married either, and those who were married didn't have so much of the old-fashioned virtue Helen tried to keep alive. It hadn't been easy for Helen either. Take her run-ins with Hal Vincent, for example.

Anyway, Helen was playing a corpse again. She had only done three professional things since getting out of dramatics school five years ago. Three corpses on Larry's whodunit.

It was a dead end. Nobody seemed to remember a corpse no matter how pretty it looked, and this time she could only act the part with her legs.

"You can't be convincing at all," Jimmie said. "Nobody looking at your legs will believe you're dead."

Jimmie wanted to add that he could play that part without half trying. He'd been dead in the business ever since fouling up that Montgomery show over six months back. He had been scared, scared as hell of failing and he'd hit the bottle too heavy and that had cinched it and he had fouled up. He'd fouled up good.

Jimmie laughed and said Helen would soon be playing a real live girl. But only Jimmie knew how cold it was sitting there alone all day at the bottom of skid hill.

Then there was Helen busying about, getting the big dinner all ready. Jimmie wasn't hungry, but he wasn't going to tell Helen that. He slipped the bottle out from beneath the couch and took a long booster from it and hid it again.

He walked over to the kitchen,

a folding screen set up around a gas burner and a cabinet made out of an old second-hand bureau. The chops were sizzling on the griddle, and the tomatoes were nice and red and sliced up neatly on a plate.

"No call from Darryl today was there, honey?" she asked.

"You mean D. F. Zanuck," Jimmie said, going along with the old old gag as though it were fresh as a ripe new tomato.

"Sure, honey. Who else?"

"As a matter of fact," Jimmie said, "I think that might have been the guy who called. Just said he was D.F. No last name."

"Well, it must have been Darryl. What did he want?"

"Somebody to play a corpse in Superscope. Just the legs. They'll fill up the whole giant screen, so they have to be perfect. He saw your legs on TV and he won't have any other legs but yours in his new picture."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him I'd have your legs shipped out to him immediately, collect."

"Did you tell him I had to have a five-year contract with options to play corpses on Broadway any time I wanted to?"

"No. Finally I told him we weren't interested in money, that we were artists. And I told D. F. that he was a crashing bore."

"Honey, you *didn't!*"

Helen and Jimmie had a good laugh. Jimmie looked out the airshaft.

And then she was standing close to him, and she whispered. "I really did get a call today. Through the Lex exchange. It was — Hal Vincent again."

The name was enough. She didn't have to add that it was important.

"So I called, and naturally I told him I wasn't interested."

Jimmie just stood there so she couldn't see his face. He kept staring out into the empty airshaft.

"Jimmie. Jimmie, say something. I mean — what else could I have done?"

"Nothing, I guess," Jimmie finally said. "I guess that was all you could do."

Vincent had seen Helen at a party a couple of months ago. Vincent seemed to have liked what he'd seen. Vincent had a reputation for getting what he liked. Vincent was big in the business; when he produced a show it was a hit because he had done it. He could get the best books, the big money, the right names. Stories about his queer treatment of girls who didn't have enough of a name to fight back were rumored in Café Society circles. A very sordid character.

Something had happened between Helen and Vincent in one of the bedrooms of the house at which they had that little party. Helen and Jimmie had never discussed what had happened. Something else had happened later when Vincent

called her over to his penthouse apartment near Washington Square one evening to read for a part. Helen and Jimmie hadn't talked about that either. Helen was scared of Vincent.

Jimmie had nursed his rage for weeks.

"What did he want?" Jimmie asked.

Jimmie held her close to him, held her face against his chest. Her fingers dug into his back. She sounded tired, a little bit surprised. "I didn't think it mattered, honey — you know —"

"Can't ever tell about a guy like that," Jimmie said quickly. "He's a business man too. He has to have people to put on a show. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, honey, that's right."

"Jesus, he's a real bastard, but he is casting for a big show now, isn't he?"

"Yes, yes, he is."

She hesitated a long time. Finally she whispered. "He left a number at Lex for me to call. He said he had a sure part for me in his next play. A Broadway show, a sure hit, he said. He wants me to come out to his place on Long Island tonight, and — and read for the part."

She had forgotten about the chops. She twisted away and he noticed that she was walking like she was tired, and she didn't seem to care much about what was happening to the chops.

Jimmie turned away from her and laughed nervously. "That's the hell of it. You can't really tell about guys like that."

"I hate him," she whispered. "I'm scared of him."

"But in this business how can we afford —" He clenched his hands together. "Ah, hell, you're right. You're right, darling, let it go by!"

Jimmie sat down on the couch and looked at the floor. He felt her hand on his neck. And after what seemed a long time, he heard her say softly, "I guess you're right, honey. We can't afford to pass up a gamble like that. I can handle Vincent. After all, we're not kids in this racket any more, are we?"

Jimmie didn't answer. She seemed to wait for a long time for him to answer, but Jimmie never did.

She took a long time getting ready and when she left she sounded tired. He had never heard her footsteps sound that way before. The chops still sat on the table and the sliced tomatoes were getting dried out.

Jimmie wasn't hungry. He rolled the fifth of bourbon out from under the couch. Helen would be okay. She was right, she could take care of herself. They weren't kids in this racket any more . . .

There was that call about midnight. The fifth was gone by then and Jimmie was trying to remember where he had hidden that other pint, and then the call came in.

"Jimmie, I'm out here at 2436

Sunrise Boulevard. Jimmie —"

She sounded scared. "You okay, honey?" He never sounded drunk over the phone. It wasn't good business. He sounded very sober.

"There's no one else out here but Vincent and he's drunk." For Helen she sounded very upset. "He's awful drunk. He's in the next room now, and — listen, Jimmie, come out and get me. Please, please, Jimmie, come right out and get me now!"

"Sure," Jimmie said. "You'll be okay. I'll be right out there."

"Take the Long Beach cutoff. Come down the Sunrise Highway — it's exit 112. Third house on the right —"

"Sure, I've got that. I'll be right out. You'll be okay."

She had hung up, and Jimmie walked around the room trying to remember where that other pint was. He's get that and then he would go right out there . . . 2436 Sunrise Boulevard, he remembered that all right, that was it. He'd get the pint out from wherever he'd hidden it yesterday, take a taxi, go right up town and across the Tri-Borough, take the throughway — that would be Long Beach, hell that was only about a twenty minute ride out there.

Jimmie tripped over the cassock and he was stumbling all over the apartment carrying what was left of the fifth and looking all over for the pint. It was funny his not being able to remember where he himself had hidden something so important.

The script fell off the table, the clip was loose and several pages scattered over the rug. Jimmie was crawling around on his hands and knees collecting the pages and he saw the first page telling about how the camera moved in on a close-up of the corpse's legs, then go to black, it said, go to black, and there's the sound of a yell and a door slamming somewhere.

Then the camera is somewhere else, or the scene is another scene and another camera, and the corpse gets up and walks home. It's a dead end, you can't get up the ladder that way. Playing faceless corpses on cheap whodunits is the way out the final exit . . .

Jimmie seemed to be crawling down a long dark hallway looking for his lost pint. He couldn't remember finding it then but he was looking around for the flowered bowl, the kitty, only he couldn't seem to find that either. He had to find the flowered bowl because that was what they dropped loose change in every evening for incidental expenses. The petty cash bowl. Only later when he found it it was empty, and then he remembered that he had taken out the petty cash to buy the pint, and that reminded him of the pint again and he fell down heavily on the floor looking for the pint.

He couldn't get a cab without the petty cash, and anyway he couldn't find the pint . . .

Jimmie looked at his watch, hold-

ing it up close to his face so he could see that it was a little after seven o'clock in the morning, as he felt his way along the wall and found the doorknob and jerked the door open. The four bodies merged into two and behind them he saw a uniform and Jimmie started feeling sober. At least some part of him felt an icy wind and became sober as he stood there weaving a little, then leaning on the door jam.

"You're Mr. James Forest?" the older one said. He had a tanned thin face and he looked tough. The man beside him was younger and blond haired and he just looked curious. Jimmie felt scared. He had never felt so scared, and there was a raw feeling all over him as though he had been rolling naked in gravel.

Jimmie nodded. He moved his thick tongue around in his mouth.

Jimmie yelled out suddenly. "What's happened to her? Where's Helen?"

"What makes you think something's happened to her, Mr. Forest?" the older man asked.

"What's happened to her?" Jimmie yelled again. The point was — it was seven in the morning and the bed was still made up. He'd slept on the floor all night. And Helen hadn't come home —

"This is Detective Morrison," the older man said. "I'm Detective Martin. What makes you think something happened to your wife, Mr. Forest?"

"For God's sake," Jimmie was yelling. "Helen hasn't been home all night. She was coming back in a few hours and she never came back, didn't call or anything! She never does anything like that, and then cops showing up at seven in the morning! You ask me how I know something's happened to her!"

They stood there looking at him. Jimmie wiped at his lips and then looked at the uniformed cops standing back there playing with his night stick.

"I've been drunk, I'm pretty drunk yet," Jimmie muttered. "You guys give me a few minutes so I can straighten out, I'll take a shower —"

"Let's just have a talk now," the younger one said.

The older one, Martin, shook his head. "You go ahead, we'll wait, Mr. Forest."

Jimmie started across the room toward the closet-sized stall where the shower was. Then he turned. "Look," he whispered, "please tell me what's happened to Helen?"

"We'll ask questions and you'll do the talking," Morrison said. "You go on and take your shower."

Martin walked toward Jimmie, watching his face closely, and he said, "I'm sorry to have to tell you this, Mr. Forest, but your wife is dead. She was murdered. She was beaten to death and thrown in the East River and was found this morning just off Pier 61."

Martin was being blunt and honest with Jimmie with the implied purpose of getting the same return

consideration from Jimmie. Jimmie turned and went on into the bathroom, shut the door, took off his clothes that fell in a pile and then he stepped into the bathtub, pulled the shower curtain across, turned the shower on.

As the water streamed down against his face, Jimmie dropped down on his knees under the water and began to cry.

He cried for a long time, and then he got out of the shower, and dried himself, and started working the electric shaver over his face. He looked at his sagging face in the mirror, at the blood-shot eyes. Helen hadn't cared. Helen had had faith in Jimmie. Helen had had faith in both of them, but now she was dead.

Helen had all that faith. She had fought harder than any of them, and what good had it done? Jimmie felt the tears welling up again, and he swallowed them somehow and kept on shaving.

She hadn't been willing to sell out to Vincent and Vincent had killed her. Jimmie knew that. He knew enough about Vincent to know that was logical. Only Jimmie wasn't being logical about it. He knew that Helen was dead and that Jimmie was not much different, and so were a lot of other corpses walking around who couldn't admit they were dead, but they were dead as Helen was, all murdered by Vincent.

Vincent —

Jimmie looked at the cracked mirror, not remembering the crash, watching the electric razor and shards of glass lying in the sink.

Jimmie opened the door and went out.

He had to get Vincent. For Helen and himself and everybody else. That was a plain duty and he didn't feel like crying any more. He didn't feel sad about anything. It was too late to cry, but there was plenty of time for Vincent to die.

Only Jimmie knew he had to be careful. He didn't want the cops getting in the way. Anything could happen inside the law, and a guy like Vincent could get off, maybe altogether, or at least too lightly. But the sure way was to do it yourself.

Jimmie knew he was probably the only one who could tie up Helen with Vincent last night. Vincent had probably killed her over on Long Island, then brought her across and dumped her in the river, and maybe someone had seen something but the chances are no one had seen anything.

So that meant that if Jimmie didn't tell the cops the cops wouldn't have anyone else to think about right now in connection with Helen but Jimmie. But Jimmie didn't care. They could hold him and grill him and pump the hell out of him, they could kill him if they wanted to, but he wouldn't tell about Vincent. And then he would get Vincent. He concentrated on that, on Vincent's

name, and he knew he wasn't going to be shaken from his purpose.

They questioned him for a long time. It was a long time, but Jimmie didn't know how long, he lost track of time, and he didn't care much either. Because he knew Vincent would still be waiting whenever the questions stopped and they let him go. Vincent was still going to be around. Others disappeared every day, but Vincent stayed around and he would be around until someone made sure he wasn't. The cops might not be able to do that. But Jimmie could. Jimmie could and Jimmie would, and Jimmie stuck to his purpose.

Helen had been found by a beat officer floating and now she was in the Bellevue morgue. Jimmie had been there and they had shown her to him there in the Bellevue morgue, and she was still there, and she would be there for several days yet, but Jimmie hardly remembered going into that big room and looking at her, and coming out again. It hadn't made any difference in Jimmie's story. He kept on telling them the same story.

He told them the same story on the way to the Bellevue morgue, and the same story going from there over to the precinct station. They put him in a small room there and they kept asking him questions and being a little rough at times, but he stuck to his story.

It wasn't hard to do really because basically the story was true.

"You say you didn't know where she was going, Mr. Forest?"

"I said she was going out for a walk. She went out for walks a lot of times in the evenings. She never said where she was going especially. She just went out for walks."

"When was the last time you saw your wife, Mr. Forest?"

"Why don't you call me Jimmie? Christ, haven't we been friendly long enough to call me Jimmie?"

"When was the last time —"

"I said it was about nine o'clock. But I was too damn drunk to know for sure. I was too drunk to have followed her and beaten her up that way and thrown her in the river." Jimmie wanted to yell at them. He had to stay calm. "I wouldn't have done that, not for a million dollars. We loved one another —" he whispered. He looked at the blank wall and said it again, not for them, nor for anybody else. "We loved each other."

"You don't have any idea where she was going, that right?"

"Along Central Park West, that's where she usually walked."

"She was dressed up pretty fancy, Jimmie, just for walking."

"She was dressed up that way when she got home. She'd been making the rounds all day. She was an actress. She had to look that way."

"She in the habit of dropping into any bars around there?"

"Maybe. If she was she didn't tell me. I think she would have told me."

"We'll check that too, Jimmie. How many hours — how long was she usually out for these walks?"

"Different hours. Sometimes several hours. Sometimes she sat in the park."

"So when did you start getting worried about her maybe having taken too long a walk?"

Jimmie thought about it a while and then the words fell out of his mouth. "I was too damn drunk to worry." He felt like he was going to cry again. "I passed out!" He yelled at them all at once. "I was too damn drunk. I passed out!"

Martin started walking toward the door. "Send him home," Martin said. He sounded tired. "Send the poor bastard home."

He was crying again. He didn't know he had been crying again until he was walking along the street and also noticed that the sun was going down between the buildings at the end of 68th Street and West End Avenue. He glanced at the edge of a newspaper on a streetcorner stand and it said that today was Friday.

It had seemed a lot longer than twelve hours, but it was only a little after seven. He went up to the room and took a while getting dressed. It was funny, funny as hell, how important he felt about getting dressed up for it. He put on the single breasted charcoal suit, the white ribbed shirt with the tab collar, the cuff-links Helen had gotten him for his birthday, the narrow wine colored knit tie.

He caught a cab and gave the hackie the address. He remembered the address quite clearly as though it were written out on the air. "2436 Sunrise Boulevard."

All the way out there, Jimmie thought about how he was going to do it. A series of fantasies went through Jimmie's mind, so real he could hear Vincent screaming for mercy in them, and feel the blows falling. He could feel them against his knuckles as he sat there with his eyes closed and he could see Vincent trying to get out of a locked room, falling, his face bloody, falling and whimpering and crying for mercy.

Maybe Vincent wouldn't be out there at his little Long Island hideaway. If he wasn't there now, he would be there later. Jimmie could wait.

It was nice out there, cool and green with plenty of trees. It was quiet out there with the atmosphere of good living. And Vincent's cottage was way back among the trees.

Jimmie told the cabbie to wait. He might have to wait a long time because Jimmie wasn't leaving until he had his visit with Vincent.

He was on the porch and starting for the door and he felt much better because there was a light already burning in the front room, and Jimmie could see a big log fire burning in a big fireplace.

That's what Jimmie had figured on, but now he was sure and very glad. It hadn't seemed likely that Vincent would be running around after what had happened last night.

Jimmie rang the bell, when Vincent answered the door, Jimmie shoved Vincent back and stepped inside and shut the door fast, and hit Vincent several times. Vincent was a short fat man with a sunlamp tan who fell on the thick green rug. His bathrobe fell open and he was trying to get up onto his hands and knees.

"I'm going to kill you," Jimmie said.

"Why —"

Jimmie kicked Vincent on the fat jowl, and then grabbed the collar of his bathrobe and lifted his head a little off the floor. He started banging Vincent's head up and down on the rug.

He dragged Vincent over where the rug ended and the floor was harder.

The thudding came up through Jimmie's arms and he got to thinking of maybe not killing Vincent because killing was too easy for Vincent. He had an idea of locking Vincent up in a small greasy room, a room with no window in it, except one opening out into an empty airshaft with a dirty gray wall to look at for a hundred years, and no sound except every morning a lot of empty garbage cans rolling. But that wouldn't be possible. The next best thing was to kill Vincent.

Vincent squealed and rolled away somehow and Jimmie remembered running through several rooms after the little man and finally cornering him in an oak-paneled room lined with books where Vincent was crouching behind a desk.

Blood was running down Vincent's face and one of his eyes was closed.

Jimmie started for him, but Vincent was saying, ". . . won't bring Helen back, will it, Jimmie? Will it? I ask you, where'll you be then, Jimmie . . ."

". . . *where'll you be then, Jimmie?*"

Where'll you be then?

Something cold touched Jimmie. Something threatened to come loose inside him, and he didn't want to feel scared like that again, not the way it had been in the room, in the empty room all those months. Nobody wanted that. Where'll you be then?

"Hell, you forget who I am, Jimmie? I'm Vincent. For God's sake, don't be a damned fool, what do you want? I'm Vincent. Just tell me what you want. Name it, Jimmie. You name it . . ."

And Jimmie always remembered how it was a funny thing, his being dressed up for it, all dressed up, as though he'd known how important Vincent was, and that there was always the chance of signing a contract.

It did something to Jimmie, making Vincent draw up the contract,

putting everything in it, making it iron-tight so that as long as Vincent had anything to do with show business, Jimmie would be in.

Once the cops got word from Jimmie that would tie Vincent up with Helen's murder, they'd work on Vincent until they got it out of him. Vincent knew that. Vincent didn't want any of that. So:

"What else do you want, Jimmie? You name it. I'm Vincent."

And Jimmie realized something, as if he'd never seen it before: killing Vincent wouldn't bring Helen back. Nothing would do that. All the killing in the world wouldn't bring Helen back. *And besides, Jimmy,* he told himself, *besides, who's to blame? If you hadn't been drunk, Jimmie, you'd have gone when she called you and she wouldn't be dead. If you hadn't made her go in the first place, she wouldn't be dead now. So you're to blame, too, aren't you, Jimmie? You killed Helen just as much as Vincent did.*

Didn't you, Jimmie?

So it didn't really matter . . . did it?

Martin has been around a few times, but Jimmie has never changed his story, and maybe even Martin doesn't care any more. There are a lot of murders happening every day, and Helen wasn't important enough, really. Jimmie still talks to Martin, though, when he has time.

And the play has been running for six months now, and maybe Jimmie will get the same part in the movie they're going to make out of it. If Jimmie can stay off the bottle he's got a great career ahead of him. And Jimmie's going to make it, too, if he can just stay off the bottle.

Sure, Jimmie's going to make it.

Just like Helen always said.

STATEMENT

REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF MANHUNT, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1955.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Editor, John McCloud, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Managing editor, Hal Walker, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Business manager, Richard E. Decker, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

2. The owner is: Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: Michael St. John, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Gertrude-Faye St. John, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Richard E. Decker, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Leo B. Mayer, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

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RICHARD E. DECKER
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 9th day of September, 1955.

[SEAL] BLANCHE WADSWORTH, *Notary Public*
(My commission expires March 15, 1957.)

Dangerous

It's no trick at all, playing the field like I do. You just got to be very careful . . .

A Novelette

BY HAL ELLSON

LAST NIGHT was a ball. I got home with the hoot-owls, got so reefed up I thought I was flying.

The morning's different. My skin is tight, got a bad feeling. I lay in bed and watch the shade moving.

It's a long way to night. My eyes is closing again when somebody starts pounding on the front door. I'm out of bed like a shot, but I'm clean. Cops don't want me.

I go to the door. "Who's there? What you want?"

It's the man for the rent. I tell him nobody's home and he stomps down the stairs, stops at another floor and starts knocking. He ain't pecking on that wood, either. It's a real knock like he going to bust through if they don't open up for him.

Can't sleep now. I move to the kitchen and don't find nothing to eat. I duck in the shower, get set for the street. The sun's blinding when I reach it. Some loose change is jingling in my pocket, but still I ain't for supporting restaurant people.

I hit for Tiny's house, tap on the door, kick it when she don't answer.

That brings her on the run. Man, I'm ready to jump down the stairs cause this is a witch. Her hair is flying and she's bald where her eyebrows is supposed to be. A true-ugly girl, but food comes first, and you don't look at nobody's face when you hungry.

Tiny gives me a real welcome and says, "What brings you around, Domino?"

I tell her I'm a little short of change and hungry. She love me, so I wiggle my way in easy.

"You want something special?" Tiny says.

"I want bacon and eggs, anything you got if you ain't got that."

There's no argument. She almost falls on her face getting to the kitchen. I stretch on the couch and think about my troubles, all this mess I done got in. I guess I'm a greedy cat with the broads cause I keep playing the field, and that's kind of dangerous.

Tiny's ugly, so it ain't no problem with her. Give her a baby pat and she belong to you till her teeth fall out.

The others ain't too difficult. All you need is the jive, but I got two on my hands I like, and both is dynamite.

There's Dusty. She got a built that wasn't made in a day. Plus personality.

Then there's Lennie. . . .

I'm called and I move to the kitchen. I sit and dig in. Tiny's got nothing but a cup of coffee. She

don't touch it but watches me.

"What you thinking about?" she asks. "Somebody after you?"

"Nay, nothing like that. You ought to know what the trouble is."

"Yeah, you're like Daddy Do-Right, but you don't do right with the girls. Play around some more and see."

"Maybe I was born too handsome."

"You mean you just greedy for all the girls."

"You know that too?"

"I know more. Somebody going to love you too much and put an axe in your head."

I laugh on that, but it ain't a new saying.

"What about Dusty?"

Tiny shakes her head. "That old half-breed girl's just a showoff when she ain't got nothing to show."

"Sister, you're blind. She got almost everything."

"Everything to make trouble. Is she really loving you?"

"It couldn't be nothing less."

"Then why she got eyes for so many others?"

"No reason except she just the friendly type."

"You see the way she dances?"

"Yeah, almost as good as me."

"Only that ain't dancing she does. She could do better without no music. Any way you look at her, that girl's trouble."

"What about Lennie?"

"Now you looking for real trouble."

"Why say that, Tiny?"

"Cause she's dangerous."

"I like the danger ones."

"Not like Lennie. She's the jealous type."

"Yeah, tell me a girl who ain't that type."

"Lennie's different."

"How come you know so much about that?"

"I just know. A girl can see into another girl what a boy can't see. She's the kind that wants all to herself."

"What else can you say about her?"

"That ain't enough? Let her be by herself, or you going to be in trouble."

"Lennie's coming to Saturday's party?"

"How could she miss?"

That's enough. I finish my coffee, wipe my mouth, get to my feet.

Tiny give me that hurt look and says, "Why you leaving so soon?"

"It ain't soon. Your food was nice, but I didn't come for company."

"Don't leave now. Things is just beginning."

I look at her. There's only one meaning to that, but I got business elsewhere.

"Baby," I say, "I got to look for a job or I'm going to be throwed out of the house on my head."

"You will come back to see me?"

"You know I will, honey."

She goes to the door with me. Man, this girl is goofed. I can leave her stranded, but I got to build for

the future so there be more free breakfasts. So I give her a peck.

That ain't enough for her. She clinches with me. I give her a clinch, unwind her arms, tell her I got to go, and make it for the street. Dusty's next on the list.

2.

I tally-ho over to her place. A tap on the door lets me in.

"Say, baby, what's happening?" I say and I breeze for the parlour.

There's music on. Dusty walks in after me and says, "Why are you here now?"

"I couldn't make it last night. I got all fouled up in some deep gambling debts."

"I'm supposed to believe that?"

"Look," I say, "I come all the way here to see you and this is the way you treat me?"

"You got a nerve talking about treating."

"Okay, if that's the way you feel, then let me tell you something that ain't exactly news. You ain't the only one in existence. There happens to be others. So long."

"Wait. Wait. I was just jealous."

She's ready to crawl on her face. One step and I got her in my arms, got her lips.

"Darling, I didn't mean to talk to you the way I did," she says when we catch our breath.

"I forgot about it, you can forget about it, too."

She's smiling now, but that look in her eyes ain't fooling me. She moves away, heads for the couch, curls up like a cat. I move in, but she's wised up. Okay, there's plenty of time and I ain't in no particular hurry.

"Tell me about Lennie," she says.

"Lennie?"

"You got eyes for her."

"She's a slick chick."

"What's she got I haven't got?"

"Nothing, baby."

"That girl ain't really liking you."

"I didn't say she was. But you're jealous, baby, and you got no right to be. It's you I'm for."

"You got to prove that, Domino."

"Yeah, then tell me, why am I here? Couldn't I be somewhere else? If I'm for Lennie, why do I be for you?"

"Well, I don't know. But I do love you."

Yah, it's set. I make a pass, but it's a little too soon so I let it ride.

Dusty jumps up to dance. A new record is on. It's too hot, but I go along for the ride, pull her to me.

Halfway through we stop and sit back down. I kiss her and she tells me how much she loves me and how burned up she was cause I didn't show last night.

"If you don't believe I was gambling, you can check on it," I say. "And I didn't come to argue."

"You came just to see me?"

"Just you."

She relaxes against me deliberate. I'm in no hurry, and I close my eyes

on the music. Another record's flipped.

Dusty starts to hum. I open my eyes a little. Yeah, everything there, snug and ripe, all mine. I want to reach out but I feel too tired.

She bounces up on a new record, wants to dance again.

"Too hot," I say.

She begins to dance by herself, and I feel myself warming up.

She catches me watching, comes to the couch and drops beside me.

"It's really hot, ain't it?"

I nod, but the heat don't matter now, I catch her arm, pull her close. Her head comes down in my lap. I could have her on the second. It's just a matter of making the effort, but I don't make it. Yeah, she gave me a rough time coming in. It's my turn to teach her a lesson.

"Something wrong?" she says.

"Nothing wrong."

"A minute ago you was so anxious."

"It's too hot."

"I don't feel it."

"With what you got on, you shouldn't feel nothing."

She smiles on that, walks her fingers up the front of my shirt. I don't move, and her fingers stop. Her hand drops away.

"What's the matter?"

"You're a hunk of ice."

"Right now I wish I was."

"I mean with me. I'll bet you're still thinking about that bitch Lennie."

"Suppose I was?"

"Then why did you come here?"

"Why'd you let me in?"

She's out of my lap in a second, runs for the bedroom, slams the door. I shove it open and meet a wildcat. She kicks, grabs for my face with them long nails.

Bam, I catch her a good one, and she gets ready to scream. I clap my hand over her mouth and she tries to bite. I hold tight and tell her, "Scream and I'll haul your tongue from your mouth."

There's no more struggling. I turn her loose, give her a shove and knock her across the bed. She's breathing hard. Ain't much to that dress. Her hair is kind of wild and exciting.

I move in and grab her. Hell, what's the use of fooling around? This was what I came for in the first place.

Later, Dusty tells me, "I ain't going to let Lennie get her hands on you, ever."

I'm looking at the ceiling, smoking a butt.

"You still on that theme?"

"You ain't falling for her, are you, Domino?"

"Damn, I thought we put that subject aside a long ways back."

"Then you love only me?"

"Yeah, only you."

She takes my cigarette, blows some smoke and gives it back. Her head rolls against my shoulder.

I'm still staring at the ceiling. A

little breeze comes through the window, touches me and goes away. It's hot again.

"Domino, what you thinking?"

"Nothing."

"Want to nap?"

"I can't if you keep talking."

"Okay, I won't say no more."

She don't, and I keep staring at the ceiling. I'm thinking of Lennie.

3.

I damn near didn't make it to Lennie's. Fell asleep at Dusty's and didn't wake till somebody started pounding at the door.

I had to hit for the window and leave Dusty to do the explaining for having the chain on the door.

By the time I reach Lennie's house I'm half an hour late. She gives me the ice treatment.

"Sorry," I tell her. "I couldn't help being late."

"When I go with somebody I don't like him to be late. And I don't like to be lied to."

"I ain't lying to you, Lennie."

"There's another thing, when I like someone, I like him all the way. There's nobody else."

"That's reasonable enough."

"Then what about Dusty? I know you been going with her."

"I used to, and I'm still friendly. Can't cut her dead when we pass."

"I'm not talking about that. You know what I'm meaning."

"I'm not two-timing you, Lennie. That ain't in my nature."

She gives me a look which I don't figure, except I know she knows I'm lying to beat all. Must be I'm dopey to take all this. Yeah, but I know what I'm after.

It's already dark outside. No lights in here. There's only one meaning to that. Lennie's waiting for me.

I make a small pass to begin with. "Maybe you don't understand what I said," she tells me.

"Said about what?"

"About Dusty."

"I already told you on that. Me and her is just friendly-like."

"If you're going with me, I don't want you to see her."

"But I ain't seeing her, Lennie."

She smiles on that and I give another pass. My hand gets stopped dead.

"You're too fast," Lennie tells me. "You're not dealing with Dusty now, or any of the others."

"Girl, I know that, but I'm going to keep trying."

"It won't do you no good till the air is cleared. What about Dusty?"

"She don't mean nothing to me."

"You don't want to be bothered with her?"

"You got it."

Lennie gives me another smile. "Then that's settled."

It's a simple answer. Too simple. But it kind of clears the air.

Time for another pass. I make it. This time there's no hand to stop me.

I get her in a rush. Bam, she ain't shy no more. Before I can get my

lips on hers, she got hers on mine.

It's a real movie kiss, but in the middle there's an interruption. The door slams open and this big stud cruises in. His head is near the ceiling and he's a rough-looking character with a mean look. He gives that all to me.

Next thing I'm being introduced to Lennie's brother. We shake and that's all. He moves to another room. I look at Lennie and she ain't upset.

"He's going to be around?" I ask.

"Most likely. He's just in from work."

"Then let's you and me take a little stroll to some place better?"

That ain't out of my mouth when big brother hollers out, "You got something to eat around, get it ready, and see if I got a white shirt."

"You let him order you around like that, girl?" I say.

"He ain't ordering. He's my big brother."

"Okay, what about that stroll?"

"I got things to do, Domino. Stay here."

"Suppose I wait for you downstairs?"

"Whatever you say."

"Okay." I get up and go down, squat on the stoop and light a butt.

Waiting's no good. My mind is thinking things. Lennie's got me going in circles. This ain't me. My rep won't be nothing when my friends find out.

I wait a little more, chuck my butt and stroll for the big corner, move into the candy store.

My special friend Julie comes in and greets me. I ask him the happenings.

"Everything's quiet. Where you been keeping yourself? Who you working now?"

"You couldn't guess?"

"I been hearing stories about you and Lennie."

"They all stories. Nothing's happening yet."

He shakes his head, gives me a bad look.

"What's wrong? You don't like Lennie?"

"I don't dig the kind she is. Man, that broad got her nose in the clouds."

"Julie, it all depends on the handling. Educate them straight from the beginning and you got them."

"Then you're making time?"

"She almost eating out of my hand already."

"What about Dusty?"

"I'm keeping that as a side dish."

"Yeah, you really want trouble. Suppose she finds out?"

"It won't do her no good. I had my taste and I'm looking for more elsewhere."

"You're looking for trouble."

"I ain't worrying about that." But this conversation ain't going nowhere. "What's to a little pool?" I say. "The night is long to go."

He's for that, so we move for the poolroom, finish there, and bust open some beer later on his stoop.

4.

Next morning I'm supposed to be out for a job. But that bed feels good. Eleven rolls around before I'm up. I dress, stroll down to the candy store to sound for prospects.

A couple of guys is around, a few chicks. Julie gives me the nod and we go outside.

"Man, you really missed it," Julie says. "Two of your chicks had it out a few minutes back. There was hair and clothes all over the scene."

"What you talking, boy?"

"Dusty and Lennie met up. It was war at first sight. They was fighting over you."

"Yeah, all my wives fight over me. Who won out?"

"Lennie by a bale of hair. That ain't a girl, she's a real untrained wildcat. I helped bust it up. Look."

He shows me scratch-marks on his face. I laugh, leave him on that and move on to Tiny's.

Going up, I meet a guy coming down fast. His eyes don't meet mine.

We pass and I hit the landing, wait for the guy to reach the door before I knock.

That door opens in my face. Tiny's standing with her mouth wide. Got a fancy gown on, a ribbon in her hair, two inches of lipstick on that ugly mouth.

"Yeah, all dressed up," I say. "You going some place?"

She still can't talk, so I breeze in. I got it all straight now. "That your uncle?"

"My uncle?"

"Don't give me none of that innocent sauce. I saw the guy, he was here two minutes back."

She stays shut.

"You ain't talking now?"

"Oh, you mean my friend?"

"Since when you got friends old enough to be your father? Since when do a frog-eye like him come around? Since when you dolling up so you don't look like a witch?"

"Since when do you care what I do?" she tells me.

That's real independent for her, so I wham her, knock her back on the couch.

"Now say some more," I tell her. "I'm waiting on you to pick up your teeth."

She ain't so tough now. I relax, tell her to wrestle up some eats.

She springs for the kitchen and I stretch on the couch, get up when she calls. That ribbon's gone from her hair, the lipstick wiped off.

"What's wrong? You ain't so pretty now. Why you take off all the stuff?"

"Cause you didn't seem to like it."

"You know that ain't the true reason, girl. Sit down."

She sits and I give her a long freeze, eat, finish my coffee and ask for another cup.

It's like I cracked a whip, and I'm getting ideas. I'm full of them since seeing that man on the stairs.

The cup is filled. Tiny squats. Got to light a cigarette first.

"Okay, what's the idea? Who gave it to you?"

"What you talking, Domino?"

"You been having men up here. Who dished out that idea to you?"

"He was only one. I met him in the super market the other day. I didn't want him to, but he walked me home."

"Yeah. He just only walked you home. Who give you the idea?"

"What idea?"

"Of making money."

She shakes her head on that. "It ain't like you think."

"Yeah, I know better. A guy old as frog-eyes, and ugly as he is, is always willing to pay. What's more, a girl like you is going to ask for a little present."

Tiny got some tears in her eyes now, but I ain't falling for that.

"You still loving me?" I ask.

She nods.

"Okay, but how do I know? What's the proof?"

"What proof do you want?"

"Let me have half your earnings from frog-eye. That ain't exactly proof, but it'll do."

She passes me some folding money, not much, but this is a beginning.

"Okay, Tiny, now I believe you."

She gives me a big smile like I saved her life. Man, this is a stupid girl. She got me thinking things, but I ain't got the time now.

"Got to go," I tell her, and I move for the door.

She catches my arm. I knock it off, tell her I'm busy.

"But you don't stay no more, Domino. You only come to eat."

For her, that's thinking like a genius, but I tell her; "You don't want me to come around for breakfast no more, Tiny?"

"Yea, but . . ."

"Then choke the complaints or I might not show no more."

"You're loving me a little?"

"You know that, baby. But you want me to keep coming, you better stay quiet. I don't expect the whole neighborhood to know I'm running up these stairs."

"You know I ain't the talking kind."

"Good thing."

I give her a pat and take off. That money she gave was the easiest. Yeah, it's like I'm a businessman. Charlie One-Eye got himself a chartreuse Caddy from real earnings from real business like this.

That gives me my own idea. I'll set up Tiny and round up some more stuff. The neighborhood's full of girls stupid as Tiny. I could be a millionaire in no time.

5.

I let that hang in my mind and hoof it for Dusty's, bang on her door. She won't open. I kick on it and she opens a little. My foot's quick inside so she can't close the door. I give it a shove and she's running. I catch her, swing her around.

Man, she's had it. Nail marks is

all over her face like a cat got to her.

"Tell me the happenings?" I say.

"Go way and let me be."

"Nay. Let's have the story."

"Ask Lennie."

"I'm asking from you."

"All right, that one is crazy over you. She wants you strictly for herself."

"Could be. But it don't necessarily have to happen, cause it's up to me, and nobody's owning me."

"No matter what you say, it's quits between us."

"Nay, I'm here, ain't I?"

"You better go fast. She could come back."

"Sounds like you're really scared of Lennie."

"I am. She followed me up here with a knife and told me to lay off you — or else."

"Hey, you let her scare you like that, Dusty?"

"I don't want her cutting me. No boy is worth that."

I reach for her, give her the old line, but it don't work. She really scared of Lennie.

"Okay, have it your way. I'll see you around."

"You might see me around, but that's all."

"That's for the future to decide. Don't forget, I'm still liking you."

She gives me a hurt look and I make my exit, but I'll be back. Got to straighten Lennie. Who she think she is, Queen of the Ball?

Lennie ain't home, so I breeze and look up Julie. He's setting on his stoop, licking an ice.

"What's new?" he says. "Looks like somebody gave you a buzz."

"You seen Lennie?"

"No. Did you?"

"Couldn't catch up with her."

"That's a jive broad, Domino. Could be you're putting your head in the noose."

"Yeah, what makes you say that?"

"She's too serious. Them kind get you in deep trouble. They all for getting married and this and that."

"Yeah, you want them old free and easy gals who throw it around like it's confetti."

"Everybody for his own pick," Julie says.

I leave him on that. It's three o'clock by the time I catch up with Lennie. She comes along while I'm standing on the corner.

Know me? She don't know me from an Eskimo. I'm almost tempted to let her be. But watching that walk, I'm after her. I catch up, snatch her arm. She yanks it away gives me a frozen look.

"Damn, girl, what's wrong now?"

"You don't know?"

"That's why I'm asking."

"Well, you ought to know."

"Last night we was real friendly. Now you give me the cold shoulder. It don't make sense."

"You don't remember what you done?"

"Look, Lennie, I know what you mean, but you wrong. I waited

downstairs. When you didn't show, I figured your brother was holding you upstairs. I'm sorry if I put you out."

That story kind of catches the fish, and a soft look comes into her eyes.

"Okay, this time I forgive you," she says.

"Good, now let me pick a bone with you."

"I done something?"

"Yeah, you done a lot. I been hearing it all over about you and Dusty?"

"That's right, we had it out. It's all out now. I pulled the stopper."

"Look," I say, "I don't exactly appreciate that. Private stuff ain't for the gutter and for everybody to know. My friends'll be laughing at me."

"Me and Dusty went to it. So what?" she says. "Girls can fight over a boy just like boys do over a girl."

"Yeah, I appreciate it, but that ain't what I'm talking about."

"You ain't?"

"I'm talking about the knife you showed to Dusty."

"Oh, that."

"Yeah, that. You busted up to her house after her and showed her a blade."

"That's what you're getting excited about?"

"That's what. You don't have to do that again."

Lennie's smiling now. "But you told me," she says.

"Told you what?"

"Yesterday you said you didn't want to have to do with Dusty no more."

"So you got to pull a knife on her?"

"That's right. You know why we fought?"

"I kind of got an idea."

"I'll tell you the real idea. We had words about you. I said you didn't want no more to do with her. She figured that was my idea and objected. So we did some hair-pulling, a little scratching and so forth."

"Then you pulled the knife on her."

"Only cause she decided to cut in, so I figured to change her mind. I guess I did."

"Okay, so you did. But I don't need nobody to keep me safe with a knife. What you have to pull that for? Suppose you slit her? My name'd be in all the papers."

"That was only for fun."

"Fun?"

"Yeah, only to scare her off."

"Next time have fun some other way, Lennie."

"But it proved."

"Proved what?"

"That Dusty ain't loving you. She's scared, and she won't bother you no more."

"A knife could scare anybody off."

"Not me. She could stab my heart out and I wouldn't stop liking you."

This is just girl-talk, but with that look in her eyes, I know she

means it. She's really gone on me.

There's only one trouble. She's taking too much for granted. It's best to cool her off.

"Look, there's one thing to remember. I don't need you to protect me. Get that straight from now on in and we'll be the best of friends. Understand?"

"What's the matter, you're still liking Dusty?" she says.

"I ain't saying that."

"You already did. Maybe you want to play us both, but it ain't going to be like that."

"Wait a minute, Lennie."

I go to put my hand on her arm and she pulls away. "Don't wait a minute me, and don't touch me. You nothing but a jiving two-timer, but you ain't two-timing me."

She swings around, bounces away. I run after her, grab her arm, tell her she got me all wrong.

"I got nothing wrong."

She snatches her arm away, starts walking. I let her go cause I know I got to bust her now if we keep talking.

"You going to that party tomorrow night?" I call after her.

"If I do, it won't be to see you there."

"Okay, have a good time."

There ain't no more to say. She goes her way, I go mine. I'm still ripped, but I got to smile when I think it over. Lennie's something. But I got her on the run. She going to be at that party, and for one reason only — me.

Yeah, nobody tamed her yet. I'm biding my time. When I'm ready, she going to crawl on her hands and knees like Tiny.

Which reminds me. I got to fix that Tiny business. That stupid girl is ripe for picking.

6.

I hurry to her house. She lets me in, gives me a funny look like she's reading my mind.

I got no time to play around, so I don't beat the gong. "Look," I tell her, "you say you love me, Tiny?"

"You know I do."

"You'll do something for me?"

"That all depends."

"Don't hand me that all-depends stuff, girl. I'm asking you something, I want a straight answer."

"You know I'd do anything for you, Domino."

"Okay, good deal. I'm setting you up."

"What you meaning by that?"

"You know what. You had a customer and made a little green stuff. There's lots of more around to be had."

She starts kicking on that, but a slap takes the fight out of her.

I talk a hole in her head then. That makes two. She listening like a baby now, and I see that greedy look come in her eye. Them words do it, she's ready for business.

Me, I'm started on a career. Going to get me a chartreuse Caddilac like

Charlie One-Eye. Going to get me some more girls and expand the earnings.

Tiny brings me a can of beer. I let her have the particulars. By that time the can is empty and I'm on my way to see about customers, who's ready to pay, and who ain't. First stop is the poolroom.

7.

Next night is the party. When the time comes I'm dressed to kill. The party's moving when I arrive. Everybody's happy. Lennie's there. She gives me a cold blast, I give it back.

Dusty also is there. She gives me a soft look, that's all.

I move for the kitchen, get myself a drink. Julie's there. He gives me the eye.

"What's the happenings?" I say.

"There's a situation around. Lennie and Dusty is both here together. You coming ain't going to help the situation."

"There ain't going to be no situation. Everything's under control."

"It better be. We already told them broads not to clash, else it's their heads."

"Good deal. I'm here for nothing but fun. Don't want my wives fighting over me."

Julie shakes his head. "Man, you're making a mistake. You done mixed yourself a real zombie this time."

"How you mean that?"

"Dusty and Lennie is a bad combo to start off with. I never did trust Dusty, and I trust Lennie less."

"I can take care of both."

"Maybe Dusty can be handled. That Lennie girl I don't know about. Got a funny look in her eye. If she came to the party, why don't she dance?"

"She waiting on me, that's all."

Julie shrugs. "Okay, you know all. But wait till she finds about you and Tiny. She going to really blow her stack on that."

"How she going to find out?"

"Things like that become known."

"Don't worry, I can jive my way out of anything. You going back inside?"

"Yeah."

We move in. It's a real cool atmosphere. The lights is low, music soft, everybody keeping it proper, having fun. There ain't no loudmouth, and nobody thinking he's Joe Louis.

It's my kind of party, but I ain't with nobody. Dusty ain't coming over, Lennie's sitting alone.

I catch her eye, cruise over, ask for a dance and she accepts.

It's almost routine, but she got nothing to say, so I don't say nothing.

We go like that for six records. I say, "Who'd you come with?"

"Nobody."

"Good."

"Why is that so good?"

"Cause I don't want nobody bringing you."

She gives me a sly smile on that, and the ice is broke.

"We been doing wrong," I tell her. "There ain't no reason for us to be butting heads when we can enjoy ourselves together, is there?"

"No reason, Domino."

"We been wasting time."

"Then you ain't really sore at me?"

"Lennie, I couldn't be if I tried. But what about you?"

"I wasn't really mad with you. It was Dusty."

"I told you about her. We're just friendly. It ain't anything more than that."

Saying that I'm watching her, and a funny look comes in her eyes like she ain't believing nothing. But that changes fast.

"All right, I'll believe you, Domino. Long as you say so."

"Good thing. Then you ain't got it in for Dusty?"

"Not any more."

"That's real fine. You two ought to make up. Forget the hard feelings."

"There ain't no hard feelings between us now."

"Yeah, I know, but how about you telling her so she knows?"

Lennie hesitates. It's a little too quick for her.

"You want me to tell her? Maybe you're shy to talk to her so soon."

"Whatever you say, Domino."

She says that soft, like I'm the big boss. I hold her a little tighter and she closes her eyes. We finish the record out and I lead her to a seat.

Dusty's across the room. This is the big test. "Look, Lennie, I'm going to ask her for a dance, tell her the big news. You don't mind if I dance with her?"

"Not if it's just a dance."

"Fine."

The situation is mine. I got Lennie. Now I got to work on Dusty.

I breeze over to her. A new disc is playing sweet music.

"Let's have this one," I tell Dusty.

Her eyes go to Lennie. She's still scared.

"It's okay. Lennie knows all about it."

"How do you mean?"

"Let's dance and I'll tell you."

"Nothing doing. I don't want that witch on me."

"It's okay. Come on."

I grab her and she makes like she wants to get out of it, but I don't let her. Soon as my arms got her I feel her melt a little.

"The war's off," I tell her. "Lennie says you're okay and she ain't mad at you no more."

"Yeah, how do I know?"

"I'm telling you straight."

"What happened? Ain't she for you no more?"

This is the time for the big lie. "Lennie never really was."

"What about you?"

"It's about the same. She's okay, and that's all. By the way, who'd you come along with tonight?"

"Muscles."

"You gone soft on him?"

"Not exactly."

"Then don't. Cause I'm still liking you all the way, Dusty. He can take you home cause he brought you, but don't let it be a habit."

Dusty is drinking all that jive in. She likes it, but she's still a little wary.

"Who are you taking home?" she asks.

"I promised Lennie, but it don't mean nothing. She came alone, and this is a rough neighborhood. Somebody got to do the favor. But if you want me to. . . ."

"You can take her home, but see it ain't a habit."

She using my own words on me. We laugh on that, keep dancing. It's a real cool record. I pull her a little closer. She gives a little grind, but this ain't the time and place.

"It's nice, but slow it down, girl," I say.

We pull out of the dive, dance regular. Yeah, I got her back, but Lennie's the one. I'm near to scoring. Maybe tonight is the big night.

The record slides. I pat Dusty, tell her I'll see her later and head for the kitchen to cool my lips.

8.

Julie's there with a witch. He sends her away, gives me a funny look and says, "What you trying to do, bring down a riot?"

"How do you mean?"

"Man, you're playing them both. What's the use of looking for trouble?"

"No trouble. It's the other way around. I'm pouring oil on rough waters."

"It's working?"

"You see any riots?"

"Not yet."

"The situation is mine both ways. I got them friendly again. Got them both on the string."

Julie nods. "Dangerous," he says. "Them two elements can't be mixed. It ain't a combination. Especially Lennie."

"It ain't mixing. I'm playing the ends against the middle, the middle against the ends. It's simple as all that. You see how cooled down that Lennie is?"

"Yeah, you ever see a lion in a cage looking at you? That's the look she got."

"The lion is tamed," I say.

That's all. Lennie's waiting. I take her in a glass of something good, cruise up and say, "I know I been long, but I had business with Julie in the kitchen. You been bored?"

"Not exactly."

"Good. Sip on this drink and we catch some more records. That's a cool one now."

"You talked to Dusty?"

"Yeah, she's real glad you ain't holding nothing against her."

"That's all she had to say?"

"There wasn't too much more. I wanted to bring her over, but she's

kind of scared-like yet, so I let it ride for the while."

"She don't have to be scared."

"I told her, but she ain't taking no chances yet."

Lennie smiles on that. "Honest, I ain't got nothing against her no more."

"Fine. How's that drink?"

"It's all right."

"Not too strong?"

"Is it supposed to be? I don't feel nothing."

"Finish it up and let's dance."

I don't mean for her to swallow the glass, but she almost does. We hit the floor, move together. It's a real slow number that you don't have to hardly move to.

Yeah, this is good. We're real close. The drink helps, but it's the situation in general. I got it in hand. This girl is melting against me.

"You loving me?" I say in her ear.

"Yeah, Domino, you know I am."

"I been waiting long to hear that."

"How long is long?"

"Too long."

"The waiting is over now."

"What's that mean, Lennie?"

"What would you like it to mean?"

Damn, I know she's gone now. She gives me a long look. Words ain't necessary to answer. I look around. Everybody's busy, nobody watching us. I take them lips and kiss them good.

It's like pulling out of a crash-dive when I come up for air. We're standing in the same spot and a new record is on.

Yeah, I didn't hear it start. I'm really goofed. Lennie got her head on my shoulder again. Her eyes is closed.

I turn and see Dusty in the kitchen doorway looking straight at me with fire in her eyes. She seen that kiss.

The hell with her. I can explain it away when I get to her again.

9.

A couple of minutes later the record ends. I go for refreshments in the kitchen, get myself a good drink, bring back some dynamite for Lennie.

There's a little surprise waiting. Dusty and Lennie is talking together, purring at each other like two kittens.

"I see you two made up to be friends," I say to them.

They both smile, and I hand Lennie another drink. This one is really loaded.

"You want one?" I say to Dusty. "I'll mix something good."

She don't say, but Lennie tells me, "Bring one for Dusty if you're a gentleman."

I hit for the kitchen, bring back the drink for Dusty and she excuses herself.

It's okay by me. Me and Lennie sit out some music, dance some more. Time's about ripe.

The drinks got her. She looking

at me dizzy. I take out my handkerchief, wipe my face and say, "How's about you and me having some fresh air?"

"You know where there's some fresh air?"

"Yeah, you want to follow?"

We move out to the hallway. I got Lennie's hand.

"There's air in the street, and air on the roof. On the roof figures to be cooler. You got your pick."

"The roof," she says.

We got up the stairs, hit the dark. This is for real, and there's no time to waste. I'm ready to make the first pass, but Lennie wants a cigarette.

Okay, I light her one. She takes a couple of puffs and chucks it. Time's up. I grab hold of her and we go into a long clinch.

It's the best. We come up for air, and I say, "How much you loving me, Lennie?"

"Lots."

"All the way?"

"All the way."

That's the green light, but she stops me when I make my next move. Catches hold of my hand.

"Domino, I like you lots, but you're a no-good rat," she tells me.

That's crazy talk, like she's drunk. Got to humor her a little.

"You're saying the wrong stuff," I tell her. "This is me, Domino."

"Yeah, I know. Dusty told me all about it when you was in the kitchen catching drinks."

"Told you what?"

"You don't know?"

"How could I know what lies she told you, baby? You can't believe her jive, her word against mine."

She's stopped on that, and that's when I move in to clinch things. I catch her good, get her mouth. It's a deep long-lasting kiss, and I feel her going limp. Damn, she's all gone. I can always tell the signs.

We're ready for real business. I feel her squirm a little and I loosen up a bit.

That's when it happens. Don't know where she had that knife, and I don't see it. There's nothing but a sharp feeling in me, like electric. Then nothing. But sweat's busting out all over me and I'm scared. Cause she's like half laughing now and half crying, and coming at me with that knife.

Only one thing to do, turn tail and run. That's what I do. I run for the next roof, make it down the stairs, hit the street, fall out, get up and fall again.

Can't get up now. I don't feel nothing. That's the funny thing. There's no pain, but lots of blood. I'm bleeding bad.

People come running from a stoop to help. A woman starts screaming. That sound is in my brain and now I'm really scared, scared to death of dying.

The Boiler

A True Crime Story
From
Actual Case Records

BY ANDREW J. BURRIS

Everybody figured that Luetgert would murder his wife for what she'd done. But instead, he went right to the police . . .

WHEN THE NEWS first got around that little Louisa Luetgert had found herself an extramarital lover, everybody in Chicago expected sudden and violent bloodshed. Louisa was a little woman, weighing perhaps 98 pounds sopping wet; her husband, Adolph Louis Luetgert, was a gigantic and Germanic figure — he was over six feet tall and, probably due to his fondness for sausages and beer, weighed

something like 275 pounds. What's more, Luetgert had a reputation for being a tyrant — he did all the hiring and firing at his Chicago sausage works, and many workmen were ready to testify to his strength and power.

Everybody expected Adolph to commit a couple of horrible murders — or one, at the very least. Instead, the big German went sobbing to the local cop.

The cop went right down to the precinct with his story. Luetgert was told, of course, that there was nothing the police could do about his trouble, and that he ought to take care of it himself, without, if possible, killing anybody.

But Luetgert didn't do a thing. He just sat around and brooded. Even beer seemed to have lost some of its attraction for him. And one night he called his night watchman into the sausage-factory office.

The watchman, Frank Bialk, was a little surprised. Luetgert hadn't been the chummy sort of person, as a boss. But now he was ready to open his heart. He told Bialk that his wife had a lover and that he didn't know what to do about it.

Bialk asked Luetgert who the lover was. Luetgert said he didn't know, but that he was ready to prove his case. He dug a crumpled letter out of his pocket and showed it to Bialk.

The letter was addressed to Louisa Luetgert. It left no doubt whatever in Bialk's mind that whoever had written it had been under the influence of Louisa's dubious charm — far, far under.

But Bialk didn't have any advice to offer, either. Eventually Luetgert did do one thing: he moved out of his home, taking with him four Great Danes he owned, and set up a rather crowded housekeeping in the office.

A couple of months passed without further development. Then, in Spring, the office where Luetgert lived and worked became even more crowded. It seemed that there was a woman visiting him.

Bialk wasn't invited in any more for heart-to-heart talks. Instead, he would occasionally get sent out for beer. Both Luetgert and the lady, apparently, liked the brew; and it was equally obvious that Luetgert was rapidly becoming less sorrowful about his wife's defection.

Bialk could see the shadow of the woman clearly through the glass door: she was a big woman, dressed in the height of fashion. One night he asked his employer about her.

"Woman?" Luetgert asked. "What woman?"

This mystified Bialk more than ever. But things hadn't really started yet. In a few weeks a new rumor started — and this one was rapidly proven a fact. It seemed that the Luetgert Sausage Works were bankrupt. The bank was going to foreclose.

Just a couple of days before the scheduled foreclosure, Luetgert went

down to the basement of the factory with a worker whose nickname was Smokehouse Frank. (His real name, incidentally, was actually and literally Oderofsky.) He gave Smokehouse Frank a few burlap bags filled with a grey substance. He told Frank to take out the chunks of grey stuff and drop them in one of the boiling vats where sausages were usually made. He also told Frank to use gloves.

But Frank doesn't seem to have been very intelligent. He didn't wear gloves and, as a result, got severely burned on both hands.

The grey stuff in the water produced smoke but no fire. This intrigued Frank, but Luetgert didn't deign to explain it to him. Later that night, though, Bialk, going his rounds, found Luetgert in his shirt sleeves, stoking up the furnace which heated the vats. There being no meat in the vats, Bialk was also puzzled, but Luetgert ignored him. This was at about six o'clock.

At ten Luetgert told Bialk to go out for some beer. At eleven he sent him out for more beer. He was resting in his office by this time, but he looked as if he'd worked hard.

He stayed in the factory, working, cleaning the vats, removing ashes, until late the next evening. Then he took the dogs and went home — for the first time in many weeks.

The next morning Luetgert reported that he'd awakened to find his wife gone. She had, he said, been around the night before when he got home, but now she was gone. He asked the police to find her.

The police started looking at once. In a couple of days they turned up a brother of Louisa Luetgert's. It developed that Louisa had been scheduled to visit this brother and hadn't shown up. He was worried.

Captain Scheuttler of the Chicago police began to grow suspicious. He visited the now-closed Sausage Works one afternoon, and found a couple of items of interest. One was a woman's change purse in Luetgert's office. This provided the name of the big woman with whom Luetgert had been spending his nights. She was questioned, but said she hadn't been in the office the last few nights of the factory's life. Adolph had told her, she said, that he'd be busy. Busy doing what, she didn't know.

Captain Scheuttler turned up Smokehouse Frank Oderofsky, too, and from his description of the stuff that had burned his hands Scheuttler deduced that Luetgert had been putting potash in the vats. Potash has no use whatever in the sausage industry. Scheuttler began to get ideas.

But first, he had to prove his case. The vat in which the potash had been tossed was investigated, and a couple of small pieces of bone turned up. This didn't mean much, though; the bones could have been anything, including those of animals used to make the sausage. Scheuttler

figured that maybe the ashes which Luetgert had cleared away might tell him more — and, for once, he was lucky.

The ashes were still outside, dumped against a side wall of the factory. Scheuttler turned up more bone pieces — and a steel corset stay. Animals do not wear corsets. But his prize find was a wedding-ring, marked L. L.

Louisa Luetgert, he thought to himself.

Meantime, Luetgert was still after the police. Why, he wanted to know, hadn't they found his wife? He even offered a reward of $200.

The reward was never paid, though. Luetgert would have had to pay it to one Adolph Louis Luetgert. It seems that Captain Scheuttler had put two and two together with some evidence and come up with a nice big four.

Luetgert found himself in jail.

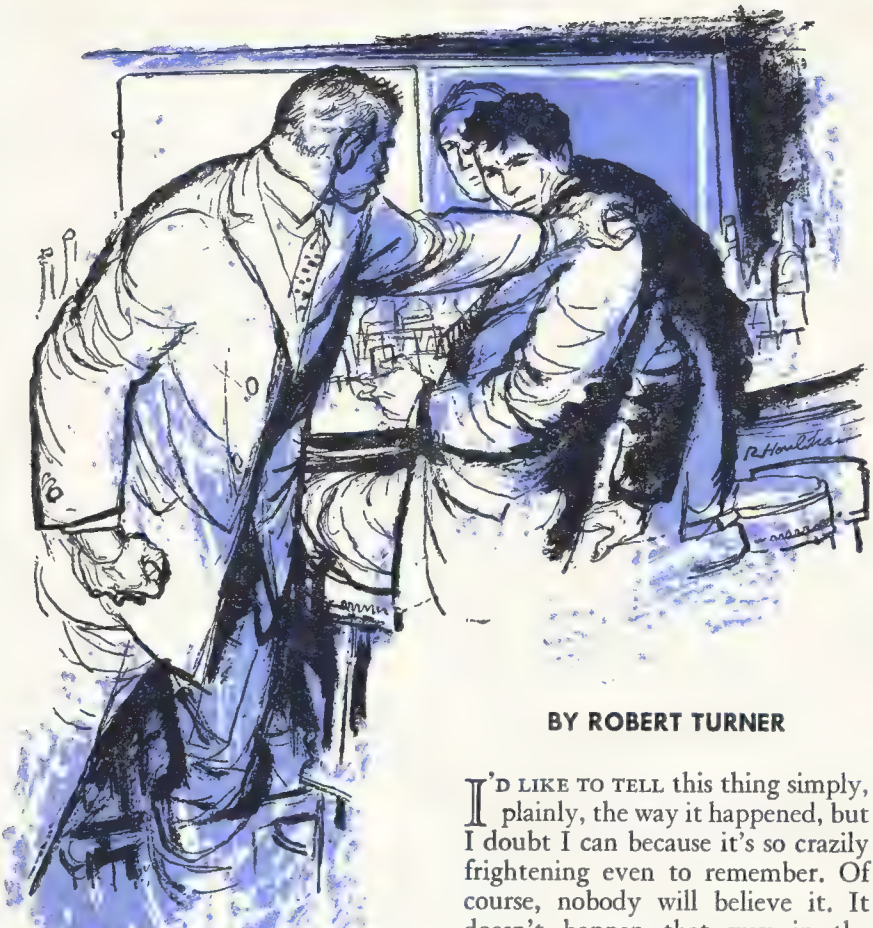
The trial was a complicated one. The defense attorney said that Luetgert had used the potash in a new experiment, making a new kind of soap. It wasn't probable, but it was just vaguely possible. The defense attorney took care of the ring, too: he made a good sob-story out of the fact that Luetgert had carried it around after his wife had left him — she'd taken it off but Luetgert still loved her, said the attorney earnestly, and carried the ring as a token of his faithful love for his erring wife.

There wasn't a dry eye in the house — until witnesses were called who proved that Mrs. Luetgert's knuckles had swollen since her marriage. She couldn't have taken the ring off without cutting off her finger.

That sounded pretty improbable indeed, and the jury returned a verdict of guilty. Luetgert was sentenced to life in Joliet prison — all because he'd decided to get rid of his wife.

The other man? Oh, there was no other man. Luetgert just wanted the field clear for himself and the woman he'd been sharing his office with — so he started the rumor, wrote the love-note and got rid of his wife.

Luetgert had pretended to be boiling mad. However, it was Louisa who was, unfortunately, boiled.



We went on to watch TV, Max and I. We didn't know it was going to be

Fight Night

BY ROBERT TURNER

I'D LIKE TO TELL this thing simply, plainly, the way it happened, but I doubt I can because it's so crazily frightening even to remember. Of course, nobody will believe it. It doesn't happen that way in the movies, in novels or on TV. But I've got to tell it, anyhow.

We weren't hurting anybody or doing anything wrong. That's one of the crazy parts. The place was a decent place. It wasn't any gin mill; it's actually an eating place that incidentally sells beer and wine. The big round bar is more like a lunch

counter, really. The place caters to a lot of old retired people in the neighborhood and anybody who just wants to enjoy peacefully a couple of beers. It has nothing to attract anybody else because they don't let anybody get too much and, if someone comes in loaded, they refuse to serve them. That kind of place.

Anyhow, Max and I were there that night to watch the Wednesday night fights on TV because neither of us has television at home. We do it every Wednesday. We have four, five beers at most while the fight's on and when it's over we leave. We're both married and got kids and wives we're nuts about so what do we want to hang around taverns for, you know?

Max I've known since we were kids. He's a medium big guy but with one of these thin, dark, sensitive faces that are almost painfully good looking. But he can't help that; in fact he's kind of self-conscious about it. But he was no swish. Max went three years in the Pacific with the First Marine Division. He never threw any weight around or acted tough, though. He didn't have to. He *was* tough in the only way that counts.

Everybody loved the guy. He'd do anything for you. He never had an unkind word about anybody in the world. He was wonderful to his wife and kids.

This is no special buildup. This was just Max, the way he was.

So he's sitting with me in this place on Sixteenth and the TV fight was over early with a quick knockout but afterward we'd had to finish our beer and then we got talking serious — I don't even remember what it was about, now — but you know the way, with two close old friends, over a beer or two.

Then suddenly I get that crawly feeling you get when somebody is staring at you and for no real reason you suddenly turn and catch him at it. Well, this happened that night and I suddenly glanced across the big round bar. Only the guy wasn't staring at me.

Sitting across from us were these two guys. I hadn't even seen them come in. They were drinking beer, too, and at first glance they looked all right; they didn't look drunk or anything. One of them was a weasely looking little guy who kept his eyes turned down to his glass most of the time. The other was chunky, almost fat, with a puffy jowled face, a thick neck and heavy, black-haired arms. The professional tough guy you instinctively know can't put a sentence together without four-letter words in it; who thinks anybody doesn't drive a truck, uses proper grammer, uses underarm deodorant and after-shave lotion, is a sissy. You know the kind. Well, they're all right; they've got their place in the world, too, I guess. Ordinarily.

But right away I saw something was wrong with this one. There was an off-beat expression on his face. It was the way he was looking at Max,

who at that moment didn't even know the guy was alive. I wish I could describe his eyes. They were brimmed to overflowing with this awful blurred alcohol-inflamed fury looking for something to focus on. This guy was trouble all ready to happen. He gave me the squeams just seeing the way he was looking at Max.

What he was doing, was waiting to catch Max's eyes. I knew right away he'd picked Max out of the dozen people in the bar as the guy to hate. There was something about Max that just at this moment, in his present state, infuriated this man. That may sound crazy but it's what I saw in him, right away.

I didn't say anything to Max but the next instant Max's attention was subconsciously drawn to the guy, too. Max's eyes met his and started to swing away and then he read what was in the other man's eyes and he brought his back in a sort of shocked fascination. Then I saw Max finally drag his gaze away. He turned to me and said something with a nervous laugh.

But I kept watching this guy over there and he still had his eyes on Max and then he said something to the little guy with him and the little guy looked up startled and said, "Where?" and looked around the bar, puzzled, trying to find out who his friend was talking about.

Then the big guy said, looking straight at Max, who was now watching again, curiously and a bit self-consciously: "Right over there. That dirty, kinky-haired spic son of a bitch, right over there, is who I'm talking about."

I felt sweat roll along my ribs and I began to tremble and get weak in the knees the way I always do when there's trouble brewing. My adrenal glands go crazy when I even see a bad car accident or stuff like that. I looked at Max and red was rising from his neck and a vein began to swell at his temple. His large brown eyes got moist looking as though maybe he was going to cry.

The crazy part was, Max doesn't look like a Puerto Rican or Cuban or Mexican, really, at all, unless you're one of those people who think that black curly hair and an olive complexion, an aquiline nose and great dark-lashed eyes automatically make you Latin, Greek or Jewish. The crazy part was, Max's ancestry was English, Irish, Scotch.

Max had about half a glass of beer left and so did I. I lifted my glass and forced myself to drain it fast, all at once. I had to. I told Max: "Come on, kid, drink up and let's get out of here. Don't pay any attention."

Softly Max said: "No, Ray. I can't."

He turned to me and his big brown eyes looked more than ever as though he was scared stiff and going to cry but I knew he wasn't. He was just hurt and embarrassed and edgy. He was also very stubborn in his own quiet way when he wanted to be. I'd long stopped trying to argue

with him when he got thick like this.

"Ray," he said. "We aren't hurting anybody. I'm not going to start anything. But I'm not going to be rushed out of here like a dog with his tail between his legs by some drunken bigmouth with a muscle on."

He spoke so quietly the guy couldn't possibly have heard him over there. I could hardly hear him, right next to him. He was almost whispering.

Yet panic swept through me. It was as though I could see the whole thing how it was going to happen before it did. Like a premonition or something. I said: "Don't be a fool, Max. I know you're all right but this guy isn't going to let it lay. He's going to force something. Believe me. I can tell and you know it's a lot of crap about guys half-drunked-up being easy to take. They get just enough, they have the strength and sharp reflexes of an insane guy. We got to get out of here. Come on, Max, please."

It was too late. The guy across the bar got up from his stool. He was wearing a too-tight T-shirt and his biceps swelled and he wasn't very tall but he had this massive chest and the kind of belly that looks fat until you almost break your fist on it. He came around the bar, hitching his belt, moving light on his feet, his eyes crazy and his face all blotchy red, and he kept his eyes right on Max all the time.

Max turned deliberately away and tried to ignore the man. Until he came right up to us and tapped Max roughly on the shoulder. His voice hoarse and rasping, he said: "What's the idea making remarks about me? I don't like people making remarks about me, you hear that, you fruity-looking bastard! Apologize."

The vein in Max's temple grew. When he answered his voice sounded soft and scared and boyish the way mine always does, too, when I'm keyed-up and trying not to show it. He said:

"Look, fella, relax. Nobody's bothering you. We're sitting here minding our own business."

"Don't give me that," the guy said. "You think I'm stupid, I don't know someone's making remarks about me. I know your type."

Max took a long deep breath. He said: "Look, forget it, will you. We don't want any trouble. Go on back and sit down and forget it." Then he started to turn back toward me, to ignore the guy.

It all happened crazy fast. While Max was half turned the guy jolted a short punch that hooked around and hit Max in the nose. It knocked him from the stool. He lay on the floor, face lax with surprise and daze. Blood was all over his shirt, all over the floor, from his nose.

Then the chunky guy turned and swaggered back toward his own stool at the bar. Everybody in the place, including me, sat stunned. Stupefied. Then it got me. The guy outweighed me forty pounds and I'm no hero but

I went out of my mind that moment for what he'd done to Max. I started after him. I didn't make it.

With a weird keening sound, not words, just that sound coming from his throat, Max was off the floor and shouldering me out of the way as he went past. He caught the chunky guy's shoulder and spun him. He threw a hook into his gut but it didn't trouble him; it only made him grunt and looked surprised. Then Max hit him with the right high on the cheek. It was hard enough to knock him out, at least to daze him, but it was too high.

Then it was on. He and Max stood there, slugging, neither bothering with any defensive technique. They just kept swinging and hitting each other solidly, mostly in the face.

In the movies and on TV, you see guys wallop each other all over. It almost looks like fun; sporting, a good workout. Only there's something wrong, something missing. The something missing is a horrible thing. It's the sound of bone hitting more bone and flesh. There is nothing else like the sound of a driven fist hitting into a man's face. The places where those blows land instantly show red or blue and there are ruptured blood vessels and abrasions. Sometimes skin is torn off and there's puffy swelling that makes you sick to look at it. Sometimes there is blood from the mouth and the nose and the eye corners. That is bare-knuckle fighting for real.

In the movies, thirty minutes after a fight you see the guys with maybe a patch of adhesive and a nice, unswollen black eye and they're ready for a frolic with a girl. But like this you see both faces get to be a hell of a butchered mess. You know sickeningly that for days, maybe weeks, after, they won't be able to shave without pain; they'll have killing headaches and maybe not see so good from one eye and have stumps of broken teeth pulled and not be able to eat anything but soup. It's an awful lot different.

This was what was going on and I wanted to stop it. I know everybody in the place did but there was a horrible unreal fascination to the fight and everybody watching was numbed and you didn't know what to do and you didn't do anything.

It didn't last long, maybe a minute or so but it seemed hours. It couldn't last long. It was Max who ended it. What I mean was, he got one in to the button and the guy reeled back and fell against a couple of bar stools, knocking them over. But he didn't fall down. He hooked an arm over the bar and kept himself from falling. He sprawled there, looking at Max and Max was waiting for him to come back for more and both were gasping like beached fish and both their faces were this awful bloody, swollen mess.

Then the guy suddenly realized he was in trouble, he'd made a mistake and he wasn't going to be able to take Max.

He pulled erect. He reached and

took an empty beer bottle from the bar. He rushed at Max, swinging the bottle. Max fended it off but it took him way off balance. At the same time the follow-through caused the beer bottle to hit the back of a stool and the bottom of the bottle broke off, leaving the neck and sharp shards still in the chunky guy's hand.

He went at Max again while Max was still off balance. It looked as though he did it very slowly, easily, he did it so deliberately. He pushed the broken beer bottle into Max's face and sort of ground it there.

Max fell and the guy dropped the bottle and turned and went to the door a few feet away and went out, the little guy who was with him, right behind him.

Everybody in the place should've known enough to try to stop them. But nobody did. I had to see to Max. He'd fallen face down. I kneeled beside him and I took his shoulder and half turned him over and I can't tell you what his face was like nor his throat. Nor the way his opened eyes didn't see me.

I let out a sound that I felt more than I heard and then I squalled for somebody to call an ambulance and I ran out and into the soft quiet night. I tore through the parking space and up and down the block, looking for them. I was swearing and crying and being sick all over myself all at the same time. I was like a crazy person. But it did no good. The two guys were gone.

Nobody saw them again. The police never picked them up. Nobody knows what happened to them.

Max? A nurse in the place tried to stop the blood from the severed jugular and other veins but it was too much. She needed clamps. By the time the ambulance got there with clamps and stuff, Max was gone.

And why? For what?

Because just seeing the gentle sensitiveness in one man offended the drunken brutal grossness in another. For that a husband was dead.

Because "they" say and it is an unwritten rule (made by whom?) that a man must not retreat from threat and insult; it's not valiant; it's not the thing to do. For that a father was dead.

Because in a time of violence, don't let them kid you, ironic things happen and the good guy, the right guy, the best guy does not always win. And so a man was dead.

At the funeral I tried to see some awareness of these things in the faces of the children and the widow. There was none. There was only stunned, bewildered grief.

The girl was beautiful, but she wouldn't pay any attention to me. So I complained to her husband.

BY ARNOLD MARMOR

It's Hot Up Here

THAT DAME was at it again. The squad car was parked near the curb and she was leaning on the fender gabbing away like crazy. A cop had his head poked out and was nodding his head while she talked. Eventually he came out of the car and they both walked into the house. The other cop, the one behind the wheel, smoked a cigarette. He looked up and I ducked my head back in. I didn't know if he saw me or not. I guess it didn't make any difference anyway. The neighbors knew she

was fooling around. And she was married to a cop too.

I lived right over her, on the second floor. She was on the first. Her hubby worked the night shift usually and she had her fun while the poor slob made his rounds. I couldn't for the life of me see how he didn't get wind of it. He was a big strapping fellow and not so dumb. I guess he trusted her. The jerk. All dames are the same. You can't trust any of them.

I lay down on the bed and thought about it. Jesus Christ! was she built! Solid. Her hair was the color of honey. I couldn't remember the color of her eyes. I guess I never noticed them. She was breasts and legs. Long slim legs. And she always wore tight dresses, cut low, and every male on the block feasted his eyes on her and probably felt the way I did.

I cursed her.

I cursed the cop with her now. I imagined what they were doing. Jesus Christ, I was going to go nuts.

I got off the bed and went to the window. I passed in front of the electric fan and the coolness tingled. It was broke and wouldn't revolve. So it whirled away like mad but shooting off air in one direction.

I looked out the window.

Two guys were having a heated argument across the street. They didn't seem to give a damn about the patrol car. Anyway, it got my mind off the cop and the gal.

The cop finally leaned out and told the guys to beat it.

One of them started walking away fast. The other looked at the cop like he was going to argue with him, then he saw his rival walking away. He ran after him, cursing and yelling.

The cop behind the wheel climbed out of the car and walked across the street. He walked to the corner, looked down the block, shrugged his shoulders, went back to the car. He was just getting in when his buddy came out of the building. They talked for awhile, then the one who hadn't gotten fixed up went in. He came out a few minutes later and I could see he was boiling mad. He was much older than the other cop and I guess the dame liked them young.

Both cops got into the car and I went back to bed.

I didn't go to sleep right away. It was too damn hot. The sweat poured. It just wouldn't stop. I got up, adjusted the fan so it would blow towards the bed and I climbed in, lay down. It didn't help too much. I wasn't sure whether it was the heat or the dame. Both made you sweat and itch.

She wasn't a money dame. She just liked her kicks. But she was damn particular. She liked them young and big. I wasn't big, just young. But hot damn, I knew I was going to try. I had to. She was bothering me too much. She gave me needles.

I finally went to sleep.

I'm a printer by trade. Not very exciting. The boss gave me hell a

couple of times. I couldn't concentrate on the work. I had that dame on my mind.

When I got home I took a bath and changed into different clothes. Everything was soaking wet. I felt better for awhile. Then I started sweating again.

I went downstairs and hung around the stoop.

Hubby came out in his uniform. He nodded at me and walked down the street. He was big. Big all over.

I wasn't sure what I was waiting for. Her, I guess. To see her, to smell her. She smelled good. She used nice perfume and I liked to take deep breaths when she was near me so I could smell that perfume. I like perfume on a dame.

I waited and sweated an hour.

She came out. She flashed me a smile.

"Hello," I said.

"It's going to be a hot night," she said.

She had on a thin summer dress. I could see her bra and a nice shadowy valley that disappeared into that strip of cloth. She saw me looking and she raised her eyebrows. She didn't say anything, though. She walked down the stoop and into the candy store nearby.

I was going to make my pitch. As soon as she came back. Now what was I going to say? Oh, yeah. *It must be awfully lonely when the hubby is away. I guess you'd take it the wrong way if I suggested an air-conditioned movie. There's a John Wayne picture in the Loew's Delancey.*

Now what was wrong with that?

Everything, stupid.

She couldn't even go for a walk with you. The neighbors, stupid. What if it ever got back to hubby? He's a cop besides being big.

I saw her leaving the candy store. She went up the stoop.

I grinned at her. Foolishly, I think.

"You're getting big eyes," she said. She was smiling a little.

"I'm only human," I blurted out.

"There's no harm in just looking, I guess." She walked past me. I followed her into the long hall.

"Look."

She turned around. "Yeah?"

"Look," I started again. "I —"

"Forget it," she said. "Whatever the pitch is. You're a little runt. Why, you don't even come close to getting to first base." And she walked up to her apartment.

That bitch. That dirty sexy bitch.

That night, she had another caller. I knew I'd have to put a stop to it. It was bothering the life out of me. Just underneath me. Making love. Rolling around and making love. Just below me. A dame I had needles for with every Tom, Dick, and Harry. Only my name was Stan and I didn't rate. It was August and it was hot and I hated the bitch.

I had never seen her take out the mail. Always him.

I wrote a nice letter. And I mailed it to him. No signature.

I waited.

I spotted him one night.

He was in a doorway across the street. He had probably called in sick and was waiting. She came out of the house and walked around the corner. She didn't see him. He was in shadow. But I saw him.

We both waited for her to come back.

Me upstairs, by the window, the fan blowing in my direction.

Him downstairs, across the street, in a doorway, sometimes lighting and smoking a cigarette.

We waited almost an hour.

She came back alone. She wasn't too steady on her feet.

She looked up and saw me and waved. "Hi," she giggled.

I ducked my head back. She'd get hers. If not this night, then another.

I lay down on the bed. Damn. I got up, fixed the fan so that it would blow towards me. I got ready to lay down again when I heard a knock.

"Who is it?"

"Me." She was crazy. "Let me in."

"I can't. Look, I'm busy. Go away."

"Oh, no. I changed my mind. I think I'll try you out, runt. Come on. Open up."

"Go away."

"Oh, for Christ's —" Then she yelled.

I ran towards the door, put my ear to it.

"You bitch," I heard hubby say. "You bitch." Then I heard a shot. She moaned and there was a thud.

He started pounding on the door. "Open up in there. Open up. I've got a bullet for you too."

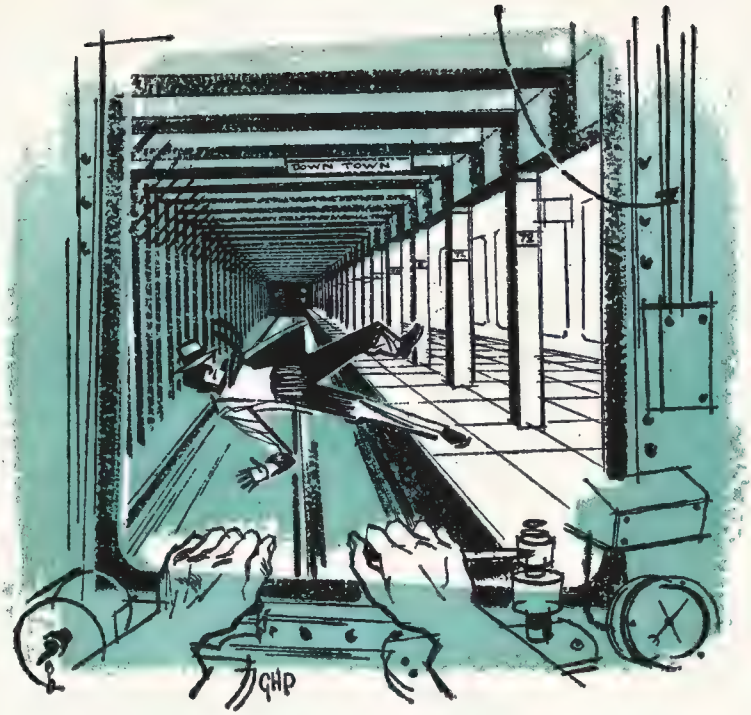
"No. No. It's a mistake," I yelled. I backed away from the door.

Two bullets shattered the lock.

He kicked the door open.

I was paralyzed. He stood there, big, and that gun in his hand. "You damn runt," he said.

The fan whirled away, cooling my back.



The Cheater

Somebody pushed Macklin off the subway platform. But nobody could remember who'd done it . . .

A Police Files Novelette

BY JONATHAN CRAIG

THE MAN HAD DIED instantly, of course, but he must have had a horrible second or two between the moment he felt himself shoved off the subway platform and the moment the train passed over his body. He had been killed at 4:08 P.M. by a downtown train braking for a stop in the station at Seventy-second Street and Central Park West. Now, almost an hour later, a subway emergency crew had recovered most of the body and placed it on the platform.

While my detective partner, Walt Logan, searched the clothing, I walked back to the bench where we had left the motorman who had been at the controls.

"You feel a little better now, Mr. Dabney?" I asked.

"I guess so," he said uncertainly. "That was a hell of a jolt." He was about forty, a short, wiry man with an unhealthy pallor and pale gray eyes that seemed to be fixed in a permanent squint. "Eleven years I've been pushing trains on this line, and this is the first time anything like this ever happened to me."

"You remember any more about it now?"

"No — and I wish I could forget what little bit I do remember. It ain't a picture a guy would want to hang on to, I can tell you."

"But there's no question in your mind that the man was deliberately pushed off the platform?"

"Hell, no. I could see these two guys on the platform before I came out of the tunnel. They were the only two passengers out there. I just happened to glance at them, and then all at once one of the guys runs up behind the other and shoves him the hell off the platform. The whole thing didn't take more than a couple of seconds, and all I could see was the look on that man's face, the one that got pushed. Jesus, I'll never forget it . . ."

"You didn't see the other man's face at all?"

"I must have seen it, but I don't remember it. I don't remember anything about him. All I could see was the other guy. It was like he just hung there in the air a second with his arms and legs thrashing around and this God-awful look on his face."

"You don't even have an impression of this other man? Even an idea of his approximate size might help."

"I tell you I don't remember a thing about him. It all happened too fast. All I can tell you is that it was a man, and that's it."

"And you're sure there was no one else on the platform?"

"Sure I'm sure. We always look at the platform, in case anybody's standing too close to the edge. If they are, we hit the whistle to warn them back."

I nodded. "We'll have to get a statement from you, Mr. Dabney, but that can wait till a little later."

He shrugged, glancing along his eyes toward the mangled body on the platform. "Whatever you say, chief. Me, I wish to hell I'd come into the station with my eyes shut."

I walked down to the place where Walt Logan was going through the dead man's pockets and entering the contents on a search-report form. The condition of the victim's body made it difficult to estimate his age, but I made a tentative guess of about thirty-five. He had been of medium size and weight, and had been expensively dressed. His shoes

looked as if they might have been made by hand.

"How's it going?" I asked.

"His name is Macklin," Walt said, straightening up. "Edward R. Macklin." Walt is tall and thin and scholarly looking; you'd take him for a college prof a lot quicker than you'd take him for a cop.

"He carrying anything that might give us a lead?"

"No such luck, Steve. No threatening letters, no dope, no anything else. All you can tell for sure is that he was pretty well heeled." He handed me the envelope in which he had put the contents of the victim's pockets.

There was a billfold containing two hundred and eighty dollars, a key ring, seventy-one cents in change, a handkerchief, a pocket comb, a box of aspirin tablets, and a folded sheet of yellow ledger paper bearing eight or ten entries. The ledger sheet was imprinted with the name and address of Campbell and Howe, a firm with offices half a block west of the subway station. An identification card in the billfold gave Macklin's address as the Ellison Hotel. Beneath the name of the hotel was a street address which had been lined out with ink but which I could still read as 631 W. 58th Street.

"That motorman recall anything else?" Walt asked.

"No. All he had eyes for was the expression on the victim's face. He's still a little shaky from it."

Walt shook his head. "It's a lousy break for us, Steve. The motorman is the only one who could have identified the killer. Nobody else on the train was in a position to see what happened, and there were no witnesses on the platform. The attendant in the change booth says one passenger's like another to him, and that he never pays any attention to anyone unless they ask directions or give him an argument about changing a ten-dollar bill or something like that. He can't help us at all."

I glanced down the platform to where the assistant M.E. stood talking with the techs and the members of the subway emergency crew. "You'd better hang around for a while, Walt," I said. "After you finish, take the motorman over to the squad room and get a statement from him."

"How soon can we open the station to passengers?"

"Not till the body's on the way to the morgue," I said. "The M.E. and the techs will have to work on him right where he is."

Walt nodded. "You going to check his hotel first?"

"Yes. It that doesn't give us anything, I'll check the address he lined out. If we're still nowhere, I'll see what connection he had with Campbell and Howe."

"All right, Steve. I'll see you at the squad room."

I talked with the assistant manager of the Ellison Hotel and learned

that Edward Macklin had signed in as a permanent guest about eighteen months ago. He had paid his bills promptly, had never given the management any trouble, and had tipped the help well and often. After I had called BCI from the house phone and determined that Macklin had no criminal record, I asked the assistant manager to accompany me on a search of Macklin's room.

2.

I found nothing of interest. There was the expected accumulation of odds and ends that a man would collect during an eighteen-month stay in a hotel room, but there were no letters, papers, bankbooks, or any other clues to his personal life. With one exception. There was an eight-by-ten photograph of a very beautiful blonde girl in a peasant blouse. I removed the photograph from its frame long enough to make a note of the photographer and the serial number, and then put the photograph and frame back together. The assistant manager said nothing at all during the entire time we were in the room.

Before I left the hotel, I used the house phone again to call the photographer and ask him for the identity of the girl in the picture. It took him several minutes to locate the negative through the serial number I had given him, but at last he came back to say that the girl's name was Marcia Holman and that she lived at 492 East 47th Street. I looked up Miss Holman's number in the directory and dialed it, thinking that if she answered her phone I would hang up without identifying myself and go to see her. It is, of course, much better to talk to people without their first having been forewarned that you intend to interrogate them. The difference in the way people — even innocent people — react when you hit them cold, and the way they react when they have had time to prepare for you is sometimes very great. Whenever possible, cops avoid notifying citizens that they are to be subjected to questioning. This involves a lot of extra leg work, but it pays off.

Miss Holman did not answer her phone. I dialed again, to make sure I hadn't got a wrong number, and then decided to bypass Miss Holman until after I had checked the address Edward Macklin had lined out on his identification card: 631 W. 58th Street.

3.

The man who opened the door to my knock was a thin, balding man of about forty, with moist brown eyes behind rimless spectacles, and almost no chin at all.

"Yes?" he said.

I showed him my badge. "Detective Manning," I said. "I'd like to speak to the owner."

"I'm the owner. What can I do for you, Detective Manning."

"Are you acquainted with an Edward Macklin?"

He frowned. "Yes, I know Eddie. That is, I used to know him. I haven't seen him for — well, I guess it's been all of a year and a half now. He used to room with us, you know. With me and my wife."

"And your name, sir?"

"Streeter. Paul Streeter." He stepped back and gestured me inside. "I guess you might as well come in."

I followed him along a short corridor to the living room. Through an open archway to the next room I could see a very stout, dark-haired woman sitting at one end of a dining table. She glanced at me without interest, and then went back to her dinner.

"We'd just sat down to eat," Streeter said. "Maybe you'd care to join us."

"No, thanks."

"Just what was it you wanted to know, Mr. Manning?"

"I was wondering what you could tell me about Edward Macklin."

"Is he in some kind of trouble?"

"Well, let's just say that the police are interested in finding out a few things about him . . . How long did he live here?"

"Almost a year. He worked in my office, you know, and when I found out he was looking for a room, I suggested that he move in with Gladys and me."

"What kind of business are you in, Mr. Streeter?"

"No kind at all, just now. I sold out several months ago. At the time Eddie worked for me, I was a manufacturer's representative. I represented over a dozen firms, in all, and . . ." He broke off, smiling a little. "But we're talking about Eddie, aren't we?"

"What was his position with you, Mr. Streeter?"

"He was a bookkeeper."

"Do you know where he went when you sold out?"

Streeter shook his head. "No, I don't. He left long before I sold out, though. As a matter of fact, he gave up his job and his room at the same time."

"I think you said that was about a year and a half ago."

"Yes."

"Did you fire him?"

"No. He was an excellent bookkeeper — one of the best I ever had."

"And you haven't seen him since he left your outfit?"

"No."

"Was he ever in any trouble that you know of? He ever say anything about being threatened by someone, or that he'd gone too far in debt to someone, or anything like that?"

Streeter shook his head.

"He ever involved in any civil or criminal case — say, as a witness?"

"Why, no — at least not so far as I know."

"You ever know him to associate

with questionable people, or be involved with married women?" I paused. "You see what I'm getting at, Mr. Streeter?"

"Yes . . . of course. But if there was ever anything like that, I certainly didn't know about it." He studied my face closely. "Listen — this is something very serious, isn't it?"

"Police work is always serious," I said. "Did Macklin ever mention having an income of some kind other than his salary as a bookkeeper?"

"No."

"What can you tell me about his family?"

"Why, nothing, I'm afraid. He had no family at all, so far as I know."

"No ex-wife around somewhere?"

"He never mentioned one."

"How about friends and acquaintances? Can you tell me where I could find some of them?" I glanced at the woman in the dining room. She was frowning at me reprovingly, as if she resented my having disrupted her husband's dinner.

"Eddie never was one to do much talking," Mr. Streeter said. "I don't remember his ever having mentioned anyone else at all. Oh, he may have, and he probably did — but it's been so long ago that I just don't recall it."

I nodded. "I guess that'll be it for now, Mr. Streeter," I said as I turned toward the door. "I appreciate your help."

"No trouble," Streeter said. "Always glad to help the police in any way I can." He crossed the room and hurried along the corridor to open the street door for me. "There's just one thing, though," he said, lowering his voice to a whisper.

"What's that?"

"If you want to talk to me again, I'd appreciate it if you worked it so it wasn't around my wife. She's not a very worldly woman, you know, and I wouldn't want to upset her. She hasn't been feeling too well anyhow, and I . . . Well, you know how it is."

"I'll keep it in mind, Mr. Streeter," I said, and walked down the steps and along the street to the place where I had parked the unmarked department sedan.

Edward Macklin's financial picture, I reflected, must have brightened considerably since his days as a bookkeeper. At the time of his death, he'd been expensively dressed, carrying two hundred and eighty dollars in his billfold, and living in an expensive room at the Ellison. All the clothing in his room had been new and of the best quality, and there had been a lot of it. And the blonde in the photograph looked expensive, too. Very expensive.

There were, of course, hundreds of ways in which Macklin could have come into money, and most of them were legal. I wasn't concerned with the legal ways; I was interested in the others. If Macklin had come into money illegally, he

might very well have come into contact with the kind of people who make their money the same way; and once involved with criminals, he could have been pushed into the path of a subway train for any number of reasons.

I walked past the department sedan and went into a phone booth at the corner drugstore. Before I talked to Macklin's blonde girl friend, I wanted to know a little more about her.

BCI told me that Marcia Holman had never been arrested but that she had been questioned by the D.A.'s office in connection with a vice investigation. She had cooperated fully, but she had not been called as a prosecution witness in the subsequent trial. The information on her sheet said that she had never been associated with any of the established call-girl outfits, and that, in fact, she had never been more than a borderline prostitute. She had been a loner who preferred to ally herself with one man for an extended time, rather than by the date or night, and usually these alliances lasted for at least a month or two. Her speciality seemed to be pleasure trips to Europe, Las Vegas, Acapulco, and so on as the traveling companion of wealthy men.

I hung up, put another coin in the slot, and dialed Miss Holman's number. When a soft, very musical voice said, "Hello?" I hung up again, went back out to the car, and headed for the East Side.

4.

Four-ninety-two E. 47th Street was a six-story apartment house with two apartments to each floor. Its outward appearance, like many other high-rental places on the East Side, was not too impressive, but the interior was something else again. I pushed the button beneath Miss Holman's mailbox, waited for her to release the door lock, and then rode up in the self-service elevator to the fourth floor.

Miss Holman opened her door almost immediately; and then, almost as quickly, she tried to close it again. I got my foot in the crack just in time.

"I was expecting someone else," she said. "Who the hell are you?" She was even more beautiful than her picture had led me to believe she would be. Her blonde hair was much lighter than it had appeared to be in the photograph, and her wide-set, tilted green eyes were of so dark a shade that they appeared to be almost black. She was wearing a topless green dress, and the upthrust curves beneath it were obviously as genuine as the bright gold hair. It was easy to see why men would want to take her to Acapulco.

"You a cop?" she asked.

I nodded. "Detective Manning."

"I thought so. It sticks out all over your face, like warts."

I opened the door the rest of the way and stepped into a lushly-furnished living room.

"You said you were expecting someone else," I said. "Could it have been Eddie Macklin?"

She shut the door and leaned back against it, staring at me fixedly. "Maybe. What about it?"

"I'd like to ask you a few questions about him."

"Why don't you ask Eddie himself?"

"I'd rather ask you."

"Listen," she said, taking a short step toward me. "I don't like cops, and I especially don't like them in my apartment. I've got important friends in this town, and if you think you can come bulling in here and —"

"Simmer down a little," I said. "Just answer my questions, and we'll get along fine."

"And if I don't?"

"If you don't, I'll take you over to the station house and ask them all over again."

She opened her mouth, then closed it and nodded almost pleasantly. "By God, I think you would. You look stupid enough to do damn near anything."

"You a special friend of Eddie Macklin's, Miss Holman?"

She shrugged. "I know him, yes. I know a lot of people."

"How often do you go out with him?"

"I'll make a deal with you. You tell me what this is all about, and I'll show you my date book."

"How often do you go out with him?" I asked again.

"Two or three times a week — more than that sometimes. Why?"

"You know how he makes his living?"

She shrugged one bare shoulder and smoothed the green dress down over her hips. "I never asked."

"Still, you must have some idea."

"All I know about money is how to count it. Eddie has a lot of it, and he likes to spend it. Why should I care where it comes from?"

"What do you mean by 'a lot'?"

"For God's sake, what is this? I mean he can go anywhere he wants to, and do anything he wants to, and not yelp when he gets hit with the tab. I only know what he spends, not how much he's got in the bank."

"He have any enemies, that you know of? He in any trouble?"

I thought I saw a flicker of interest in her eyes, but I couldn't be sure. "You couldn't prove it by me," she said. "He's a happy guy, Eddie, is. That's the only kind of man I've got time for. Guys with troubles drag me down. I've got enough of my own. A guy starts to weep around me, I hand him a bottle to save the tears in and give him a big good-by."

"Eddie the head man in your life just now?"

"There aren't any head men in my life, mister. I go out with him more than I do with anyone else, but that's a fact that can change, and change fast. I don't like losers, and I especially don't like them when they start having cops coming

around to ask questions about them. And furthermore, I —"

"What can you tell me about Eddie's friends and associates?"

She took a deep breath and let it out very slowly. "Not one damn thing. He never says anything about them, and I never cared enough to ask."

"You ever see him in company of anyone you knew to be a criminal or an ex-convict?"

She smiled at me. "Eddie? You must be kidding. And besides, I wouldn't know a criminal or an ex-convict if I saw one walking down the street with a number on his chest."

I crossed to the door, opened it, and paused with my hand on the knob. "The more you tell me now, Miss Holman, the less likelihood there is that I'll have to talk to you again."

Her smile widened. "Why don't you leave by the window? That way, you wouldn't have to bother with the elevator. It's a lot faster, believe me."

5.

Outside again, I crossed to a bar and phoned the squad room. Walt Logan had not returned, and there had been no developments of any kind. I told the squad commander that I had been unable to learn very much about Edward Macklin's background and nothing at all about his next of kin. The squad commander said that Macklin's prints were already being checked against those on file in the department and that a duplicate set was being sent by the Speedphoto Transceiver to the F.B.I. in Washington. Meanwhile, of course, Macklin's description was being screened by detectives at Headquarters to see whether he was listed as a missing person or was wanted in another city.

I hung up, took out the yellow ledger sheet we had found in Macklin's pocket to refresh my memory, and then looked up Campbell and Howe — the firm whose name was imprinted on the sheet — in the directory. It was much too late to expect anyone still to be at the office, but many firms list night numbers, and I hoped that Campbell and Howe might be among them.

They were. The night number turned out to be that of the office manager, a Mr. Owen. Through Mr. Owen I obtained the home address of Mr. Leonard Campbell, the senior partner in the firm. I gave the office manager a cover story, of course, and hung up with reasonable certainty that he would not call Mr. Campbell before I had a chance to drive up to Campbell's home in the Bronx.

Leonard Campbell was somewhere in his late fifties, a big-bodied man with a pleasant, heavy-featured face and creamy white hair combed into deep waves with a wide-toothed

comb. He'd been sitting in a contour chair on his front porch and now he motioned me to another chair across from his while he moved to a cellaret and opened two cans of beer.

"No need to go inside, Manning," he said as he handed me a can of beer and sank back down in his chair. "The wife kept after me till I had the house air-conditioned, and now she keeps it just this side of freezing. I used to sit here on the porch to keep cool, and now I sit here to thaw out." He took a long drink of his beer, sighed, and then drank again. "What's on your mind?"

"A man named Edward Macklin," I said. "Do you know him?"

"You mean Eddie's in trouble?"

"I didn't say that."

"No — so you didn't. Well, I hope not. I've got big plans for Eddie."

"Is he connected with your firm in some way?"

"Yes. He's our bookkeeper."

"What's his salary?"

"Eighty-five a week."

Eighty-five dollars, I reflected, might — if Edward Macklin had been very careful — have lasted for one very small evening with a girl like Marcia Holman.

"I'm thinking of raising him any day now," Campbell said. "He's ambitious; and if there's one thing I value in an employee, it's ambition. Why, do you know that he works late at least two nights a week?"

"Is there any way he could appropriate cash or negotiable paper for his own use?"

"Absolutely not."

I set my beer can down on the banister, reached into my pocket for the ledger sheet we'd found on Macklin's body, and handed the sheet to Campbell. "Take a look at this."

Campbell squinted at the sheet for a moment, and then got up and took it to one of the mediaeval lanterns at either side of the front door and studied it carefully. When he came back to his chair, his face was set in hard lines. "Where did you get this?"

"We got it," I said. "Those items have any special significance?"

Campbell whispered something very softly, so softly I almost missed it. "That son of a bitch."

"Who? Edward Macklin?"

Campbell tried a grin, but it didn't quite come off. "Just a manner of speaking," he said. "Damned careless of Eddie to take this sheet out of the office. It's strictly against office rules." He started to put the sheet into his pocket.

"I'll take that, Mr. Campbell," I said.

"But confound it, Manning, I . . ."

I took the sheet from his hand, folded it, and slipped it into my own pocket. Campbell stood up. "Will that be all, Manning?" he asked.

I nodded. "For this time, yes."

Campbell stared at me for fully half a minute; then he turned and walked slowly to the front door. He stepped inside without looking at me again, and let the screen door slam shut behind him.

6.

I got back to the squad room at a quarter to ten. I had done a lot of hard thinking on my drive down from the Bronx, and the hunch I'd begun to nourish from the moment I saw Campbell's reaction to the ledger sheet was now so strong that I found it difficult to view my suspicions objectively.

Walt Logan was typing out a report at his desk. "I was beginning to wonder what the hell had happened to you, Steve," he said. "I was about to call Missing Persons."

"Walt, you remember that ledger sheet you took off Macklin?"

"Sure."

"Well, I showed it to his boss. Leonard Campbell, of Campbell and Howe. Macklin worked for them, as a bookkeeper."

"A bookkeeper? Since when have bookkeepers made enough to dress the way he did?"

"That's just the point," I said. "They don't. Macklin made eighty-five bucks a week — and if those clothes worry you, you should see the room he kept at the Ellison Hotel. But mostly you should see the girl he's been shagging around to the joints. A long-lease type. It'd cost a man four or five bills a week just to keep up a nodding acquaintance with her."

"What about the ledger sheet?"

"The sight of it made Macklin's boss real sick, Walt. It put the fear of God in him — and it started me thinking. Macklin had been working like hell, staying late two or three nights a week. I asked myself why a man with as much money as Macklin had would take a low-pay job in the first place, and why he'd work so hard at it. It just didn't make sense — unless there was some connection between the job and all the dough Macklin was throwing around. I've got a hunch about that, Walt. Maybe Macklin was pulling the same thing at Campbell and Howe that he's pulled at other outfits he's worked for." I crossed to the phone and lifted the receiver.

"Who are you calling?" Walt asked.

"An old hunch-prover friend of mine," I said. "John Kerzner. He's an intelligence man with the New York office of the Bureau of Internal Revenue."

7.

An hour and a half later, Walt and I parked our department sedan in front of 631 W. 58th Street.

"We're going to have to brass it through on this one, Walt," I said as we waited for someone to answer the door. "We haven't got a single bit of evidence, let alone a witness."

Walt nodded. "Play it any way you see it. I'll back you up, right down the line."

Paul Streeter opened the door. "Yes?" he said, peering at me owlishly through his rimless glasses. "Oh, it's you again, Manning. . . . Well, come in."

Walt and I followed him to the living room. In his faded robe and house slippers, Streeter looked much older and thinner than he had earlier in the evening. He sat down in an easy chair and motioned Walt and me to seats on the sofa.

"This is rather late, isn't it?" Streeter said. "Couldn't it have waited till morning?"

"This isn't the kind of thing that waits too well," I said. "I wonder if you can tell us where you were this afternoon, about four o'clock."

"Four o'clock? . . . Well, let's see . . . Why, I was right here. I was out for an hour or two, and I got home about two-thirty."

"Can you prove that?"

"Why, of course I can. But why in the world should I have to?"

"How can you prove it, Mr. Streeter?"

Streeter got to his feet, glaring at me. "By my wife. She can tell you —"

"Your wife will tell them nothing of the kind," a woman's voice said from the dining room.

Streeter turned slowly, his mouth working soundlessly.

The woman walked into the living room. "Your wife will tell them the truth. She'll tell them you didn't get home until almost five o'clock." She stepped close to Streeter, a dark-haired, dark-eyed woman, shapeless beneath a heavy blue housecoat. "I know you killed him, Paul. I knew it the moment I heard it on the radio and remembered how happy you were when you came home this afternoon." She turned her eyes to me. "He ruined us. He cheated and cheated and cheated, and he thought no one would ever find out about it. He threw the money away on tramps and gambling, and . . ." She broke off, sobbing bitterly.

Streeter stared at her incredulously. "She's been ill," he whispered to nobody in particular. "She doesn't know what she's —"

"Better get dressed, Streeter," I said.

"God . . ." Streeter said.

"We want you to meet a couple of men," I said. "They've seen you, but you haven't seen them."

Streeter's eyes crawled toward me. "Men? What men?"

"The two men in the cab of that subway train — the motorman and the man he was breaking in on the job. They both saw you. They're both down at the station house, waiting to identify you." I paused. "We just finished talking to Internal Revenue, Streeter. We know now how Edward Macklin made so much money."

Streeter watched me silently.

"Macklin was a professional informer," I went on. "He took low-pay bookkeeping jobs to get the goods on people who were cheating on their income tax. It was a lush racket, and it made him rich. The trouble was, it made his victims hate him enough to kill him. He'd done it four times before he did it to you. One of those men fled the country, another one suicided, and the other two are in prison. Macklin was at it again when he took that header off the platform. He had enough evidence in his pocket to ruin another man, just the way he did you and the others. But this last man didn't know what was happening to him until tonight. That leaves only you, Streeter. You were the only one with both the motive and the opportunity, and so we —"

"God," Streeter said. His shoulders slumped and he sank heavily into his chair. "I guess it doesn't much matter what I say, does it?" He shook his head slowly. "No — nothing matters any more. . . . It was so hard to believe he'd do that to me. I gave him a job, I paid him well, I thought a lot of him, I even took him into my own home — and all the time he was getting evidence against me, building up a case against me for the government . . . I don't know how he found out I wasn't reporting my income on those big wholesale deals with South America, but he did. He went all the way back to when I first began to hold out — almost fifteen years ago."

"Get dressed, Mr. Streeter," I said. "You can tell us the whole story over at the station house."

Mrs. Streeter walked out of the room, moving very slowly, her eyes almost shut.

"I didn't even know the government paid a reward to informers for turning in tax-dodgers," Streeter went on. "But it does. My God, it paid Macklin almost sixty thousand dollars — ten per cent of everything it got out of me. I know, because he showed me the check on the street one day, just to gloat over me. He wasn't human, I tell you. Today, when I went down in that subway station and saw him, everything started churning up inside of me. It made me sick to my stomach to think about what he'd done to me. And then, when I heard that train coming in, I knew what I was going to do. He hadn't seen me, and there wasn't anybody else on the platform. I knew I'd never have another chance."

I glanced at Walt Logan. "Go with him, Walt, while he gets dressed."

Streeter stood up, drawing the bathrobe about him tightly as if he had grown cold.

"I thought he was just ambitious," he said.

The woman kept screaming at her — and Esther stood there, with the heavy pot in her hand . . .

Breaking Point

BY ELEANOR ROTH

ESTHER WAS FRIGHTENED. She was hurrying so much that her hands were fumbling and slowing her up. She hoped the boys wouldn't come home and that Mr. Gunheim wouldn't wake up yet. If she could finish vacuuming the rug real fast, maybe Mrs. Gunheim wouldn't be quite as angry with her when she woke up off the kitchen floor, where she had foolishly decided to sleep.

Things had been odd ever since she had come here to work for Mrs. Gunheim. Miss Boyd, who was some kind of a special worker, had taken her here from the school. That first day Mrs. Gunheim had looked her over very carefully. Mrs. Gunheim

was quite tall and had yellowish hair, but she was taller and had yellower hair. They were taken to a room on the second floor and Miss Boyd had said, "Oh, yes, this is fine," and Mrs. Gunheim had answered, "It's a pity she won't be able to appreciate it."

When Miss Boyd left, Mrs. Gunheim took her to a closet and gave her a black dress and a white apron and cap. It was a drab combination — not nearly as pretty as the colorful clothes she had worn at school. Mrs. Gunheim told her to change the apron and cap twice a week and the dress once a week for others exactly like them. It seemed silly to change her clothes if she wasn't going to put on something different.

Mrs. Gunheim had three sons and a husband. Two of the boys were very fat and the other was tall and thin. They all ate a terrible amount of food. Mrs. Gunheim liked to cook in pressure cookers, because it was so much faster. She usually had three pressure cookers going on the stove at the same time. When the food was ready they would hiss and sputter. And Mrs. Gunheim had a funny habit. She ate a lot while she was fixing the food, and then she would belch. She would interrupt the rhythm of the sputtering pressure cookers, and when that happened, it seemed funny to Esther and she would laugh. She didn't know it, but she had a vacant, far-away look when she laughed. It would frighten Mrs. Gunheim, and she would get angry sometimes and holler for her to stop. So now when Mrs. Gunheim belched with the pressure cookers, Esther would turn her head so Mrs. Gunheim wouldn't know she was laughing.

As far back as Esther could remember, her mother used to holler at her because she could never do things right, and always got in trouble. But afterwards, her mother would just look at her sadly, and when Miss Boyd came to take her to the school her mother had cried something awful. But Mrs. Gunheim was backwards. She had looked at her pityingly when she first came, but now all she did was holler.

She had been at school at the Institution since she was a little girl, and now she was a grown-up young lady. There had been lots of other girls just like her who had come because they couldn't do things right, either, and people used to pity them and holler at them, too. They used to play games and have lots of fun, but they had been taught real lessons, too. When they got out they would go to fine houses, and work for the ladies who lived in them. They were taught to dust so not a speck could be found, how to wash floors real clean, to wash dishes ever so carefully, and even to teach games to children. Setting tables had been the hardest thing, but she could do it finally, and she never had placed a spoon or knife in the wrong place ever since she had worked for Mrs. Gunheim.

When Esther had finished varnish-

ing the floors, so they looked like a mirror, she would bend over to look at herself, and Mrs. Gunheim would come up behind her before she even realized it and say, "You're finished? Good. Now you can do the stairs, or the closets, or the silver" — but she would never let Esther stay and look at herself in the polished floors. What was the use of making floors so nice and shiny if you weren't allowed to look at yourself afterward and be happy that you had done a good job, as they said you should be at school?

One day she was taking the garbage out just as the garbage-collector came and he smiled at her real friendly-like. It was the first time someone had been so nice to her since Miss Boyd had left. She stood there and smiled back at him vacantly, when he gave a short laugh, got down off the truck, and put out his hand to touch the front of her dress. Mrs. Gunheim came out on the back porch just then and screamed for her to come in. She angrily told her never, never to stand out there with any of the men that came to the house. As Esther had started to scrub the woodwork in the hall she thought how unfair Mrs. Gunheim was. She hadn't done anything wrong — just stood out there one minute at the garbage pail. They hadn't even said one word.

Mrs. Gunheim wanted her to be a real maid. Whenever a person came to the house she wanted Esther to answer the door, and she took great pains to teach her how to greet the people, to take their hats and coats, and to act like a regular private maid. Esther was proud that she was able to do it so well, but Mrs. Gunheim never told her she was good.

Then Miss Boyd came to pay another visit. She said that Esther had passed her three-month trial. Now she was a real maid and was to receive five dollars a week. But as Miss Boyd felt that she couldn't really use that much money, she was to be allowed one dollar a week for movies and spending money, while the other four dollars would be sent to her mother. Miss Boyd told her that she was supposed to have an evening off every other week now besides her free weekly afternoon. Esther was surprised. She hadn't known she was supposed to have any time off.

But after she was put on a regular salary the work became more difficult. Mrs. Gunheim always had something for her to do, no matter how hard she had to look for it. She was busy every minute, and Mrs. Gunheim never gave her time to admire her work. Just as she would finish scrubbing the pots, and was holding them up to smile in them, Mrs. Gunheim would interrupt her. So, nights when Mrs. Gunheim was entertaining, she would sneak into the kitchen, open the cabinets, and look at the pots. If Mrs. Gunheim called and she didn't hear, she would come into the kitchen and find her playing with the pots and holler again. After long thought, Esther

decided that Mrs. Gunheim didn't know how to clean things so shiny and pretty herself, and that was why she didn't appreciate her fine work.

But Mrs. Gunheim was aware of the enjoyment that Esther derived from making things shine, and Esther soon found herself in the garage, washing the car three times a week. But she liked to do it — Mrs. Gunheim wouldn't follow her out there because it was too cold, and she could just stand there and enjoy its shininess, and look at herself, all distorted, in the curved enamel surface.

She took a more personal pride in the house, now that she was working on a salary, like a real maid, and she carefully kept the furniture and the floors, the silver and the pots, and the kitchen and bathroom fixtures all as bright and gleaming as mirrors. She liked to walk through the house early in the morning, when everyone else was asleep, and see her reflection almost everywhere. It was a game, to see sparkling faces of herself looking up at her wherever she went.

She got so used to the place that she would forget when her day off came, and Mrs. Gunheim would forget too.

But one day she felt tired and, while working quite slowly, she dropped a few dishes and broke them. Mrs. Gunheim hollered and called her stupid, and Esther took out her anger by scrubbing the top of a pressure cooker, which had been crammed too full of food so the top was all sticky. She scrubbed it so quickly and so clean she thought she would wear it out.

That night Esther asked if she could go to sleep early, but Mrs. Gunheim wanted her to stay up late and serve at a party she was giving. Esther thought that she would surely do something wrong, because her arms seemed to drag, but she tried very hard, and got through the evening without making any mistakes. She thought that Mrs. Gunheim might tell her how good she was — but she said nothing, not even "goodnight," when she went upstairs while Esther was sleepily cleaning up the dishes.

The next morning Esther's eyelids felt glued to her eyes when she heard her bell ringing, much earlier than she had ever heard it before. Mr. Gunheim didn't feel well, and Mrs. Gunheim wanted Esther to go to the drugstore to get some medicine that she would call up for.

It was a cold winter morning — still dark, as Esther walked the half mile to the store. As she scrunched herself up to keep warm, it occurred to her that as long as Mrs. Gunheim was up, she could have taken her car and gotten the medicine in a few minutes, instead of waking her up so early. Mrs. Gunheim must have forgotten how late she had gone to bed.

When she got back she told Mrs. Gunheim that she was very tired and would like to go back to sleep for a while, but Mrs. Gunheim said

that would not be possible. She was expecting company and would need her help. Esther was very tired — her eyes and arms and legs felt like lead. She grew stubborn and said that she would like to have her day off right then, because she hadn't had any time off in the five months she had been working. Mrs. Gunheim looked surprised, and answered that she had been given an afternoon only a week ago. Esther had forgotten and, although she felt too tired to stay up, she was afraid to say anything else. So she started to set the table, and peel the potatoes, real thin, the way Mrs. Gunheim had so carefully taught her. Then her head felt so heavy that she went in the living room and sat down for a few seconds, or she thought it was only a few seconds, until she heard Mrs. Gunheim's sharp voice — "Esther, look at these potatoes — all dried out — where are you — where *is* that stupid girl?" Esther hated being called stupid. She got up slowly and found Mrs. Gunheim in a frenzy because the potatoes wouldn't be ready for dinner. She started to peel some more, but Mrs. Gunheim became impatient and snatched the peeler away from her. In doing so, she cut her thumb sharply, and the blood streamed down into the sink. Esther stood still, and watched the blood staining the sparkling enamel. "Don't stand there! Get me a bandage, stupid!" Mrs. Gunheim screeched. When Esther came back she was fretting about dinner being late, and here she was, not even dressed yet. Esther finished the potatoes, and Mrs. Gunheim had them hissing in the pressure cooker in a few minutes. Esther was moving around the kitchen very slowly, because she hadn't fully waked up from her nap, but just then, Mrs. Gunheim, in her excitement, began to belch, and Esther stopped to see if she would interrupt the rhythm of the hissing and sputtering noises of the pressure cooker. As she did so, she looked very tired, very vacant, as she smiled into space, smiled at the funny syncopation of the two noises.

"Esther — stupid! Here I am hurrying so and you stare in space like a fool! Take this off the stove, quickly!"

Mrs. Gunheim bent down to open the oven door of the stove, as Esther lifted the pressure cooker, and stopped a minute to see her own shiny face looking up at her. She held the steaming pot a second too long — and then her aching arm fell and dropped it. The dull thud as it struck Mrs. Gunheim's head startled her, but she remained perfectly still as she watched Mrs. Gunheim crumple and fall, watched the blood begin to form patterns in Mrs. Gunheim's hair and saw the skull itself, broken and sunken in, as Mrs. Gunheim sank to the floor and stayed there. Esther stood there watching for a minute, but Mrs. Gunheim didn't move, so Esther walked into the living room and sat down on a

chair. She thought that maybe Mrs. Gunheim had been as tired as she was, and just couldn't stand up another minute.

She didn't hear the guests when they repeatedly rang the bell, and she slept on while the boys came home for supper, and finding the door locked, hurried back to their friends. And Mr. Gunheim was still sleeping off the effects of the drug he had taken in the morning.

So when Esther woke, she found the house exactly as she had left it, except that it was now getting dark. She jumped up and went into the kitchen, where she was frightened to find Mrs. Gunheim still lying on the floor. She dared not wake her up — she thought that she must be very, very tired. So she decided to do what Mrs. Gunheim would ordinarily have her do — go over the rugs carefully after the company had left. She realized with a start that it was evening now — that the company hadn't come, and Mrs. Gunheim was still lying on the floor. But her sluggish mind told her to do only what she would usually do — go over the rugs. Maybe if she did a good job and didn't waste time Mrs. Gunheim wouldn't holler at her for letting her lie on the kitchen floor like that for a whole afternoon. But she was confused — she wondered what Mrs. Gunheim would do to her when she woke up. . . .

WATCH FOR . . .

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Spectator Sport

Ken stood there while Pink Shirt watched the women. He knew that Pink Shirt was going to get tired of just watching . . .

BY ROY CARROLL

EVENING SLIPS DOWN over the park, and by now Ken's getting flustered, sticky hot, all on edge. But he finally spots Pink Shirt. Ken gets this strong hunch. Pink Shirt is a good one to watch.

Pink Shirt is sitting on the bench by the carousel where he can get a good up-angle look at the flying skirts as the girls come riding round.

Hot, muggy July evening in the park. Not much breeze. This stuffy hot feeling in the air. Everybody feels it. Everyone wanting to breathe. The girls not having much on and wanting to take everything off, tear off everything. Ken knows.

It's the time to find a guy like Pink Shirt.

Ken's been looking for such a guy all afternoon. Been at the carousel several times. Those guys hang around there looking at the skirts blowing up. Ken knows this.

Now Ken's got a very strong hunch that Pink Shirt is his baby. A little, thin shouldered, skinny guy wearing baggy slacks, sandals, no socks. Feet dirty. Pink sport shirt faded and sweat stained under the scrawny arms. Red pimples all over around his neck, thin neck, red-wattled like a turkey's.

Not that they all have the same build or same face at all. But they all have a certain similarity. Something pale and sick, a sweating sick look. Always nervous, always shy and sneaky. They never let a girl know they're looking or even interested. Not when it's light. Not when there are other people all around.

Like Pink Shirt is doing now, all of them pretend they're looking at something else.

When this girl starts past the bench, Pink Shirt pretends he doesn't know she's there. Soon as she gets past him, he jerks his head around and ogles her hot and heavy, leaning forward, watching her buttocks and thighs, her long legs, flesh moving under the thin summer dress.

Ken understands Pink Shirt and the others like him. Ken knows how these guys just never grew up out of the old sneaking stage back in high school. They never grow out. It just gets worse. Back then it was wrong so they had to sneak. And it's been getting more wrong ever since. Ken knows this. He understands it thoroughly.

Ken walks nonchalantly past Pink Shirt, sits on a bench opposite him, leans his head back and pretends he's dozing while kids run past, the carousel plays waltzes, somebody feeds nuts to squirrels. But all the time he's watching Pink Shirt.

Pink Shirt's got all the symptoms. He's sneaking looks. Soon as the girls walk past, Pink Shirt is in there looking, brave as hell now that no one knows he's looking. Sneaking with his eyes. It's so wrong he can't even get closer than a look now, not when it's light, not with people around. When their backs are turned, Pink Shirt's brave, aggressive, leaning forward, eager.

This pretty brunette turns, catches Pink Shirt red-eyed looking. She giggles. But Pink Shirt ducks his balding head, wiggles his turkey neck, then jumps up and walks away fast.

Ken gets up and follows carefully after Pink Shirt. Ken knows these guys, as well as he knows himself. He knows what's squirming in Pink

Shirt's fevered head. He knows that just looking at the girl that way, for Pink Shirt, is very bad now because Pink Shirt believes anybody catching him looking knows what he's really thinking and that is why Pink Shirt jumps up fast and runs away.

Ken follows Pink Shirt. Guys like that are nervous as cats. They keep on the move. They walk and walk and you'd think they didn't know where they were going, but they know. Pink Shirt's looking. He's living high just walking and looking, building up to something, nursing his hate. Looking at the girls, pretending he isn't. Looking out the corner of his eye at the couples lying free and touching one another, lying on the grass, under the trees, right out there in front of everybody, not afraid of anything, not giving a damn about anybody else.

Pink Shirt walks and imagines himself lying beside one of the girls, nobody around. All alone, now he can do anything he wants to and the girl is cowering and moaning and giving way before Pink Shirt. Pink Shirt walks faster.

Now Ken knows just where Pink Shirt's walking so fast. He's heading for the Arbor at the North end of the park. Getting darker now. Moon coming up big. People straggling out of the park. It isn't smart hanging around in the park after dark. Some people aren't smart. Ken knows this. He's learned a lot about people, and he has a real contempt for damn near all of them.

Pink Shirt walks faster toward the Arbor. Trees thicker there. Vines growing over the Arbor. During the day it's gloomy around there. At night like a cave. People been warned about it. Doesn't do any good telling people. Some people head in there just because it's dangerous. Can't tell people anything. Mostly because people are looking for whatever happens to them. They're always looking. Ken knows this.

Pink Shirt isn't heading for the main part of the Arbor, though. He's going up the rocky path, under the trees, circling round above it toward the extreme North end. Even wilder, more desolate up there. Lots of brush, thick groves of trees, thick vines, rocky gullies. Even hard-up lovers shy away from there. But somebody'll show up. Pink Shirt knows this. He's worked himself up to where somebody *has* to show. Pink Shirt will wait. Hell, he'll wait all night.

Some older woman, some old spinster, she'll show up. Sometimes a kid, a dog, an old man, sometimes some older woman who figures nobody cares, or trying to prove someone might care. Some older woman, or some woman thinking she's too old, wanting to take a fast walk through here, pretending it's just a short-cut out of the Park, maybe having other feelings about a different kind of short-cut. Kick of danger, a quick run through the dark where something almost happens,

but never quite does, not to you anyway. They figure it can never happen to them.

Not dark yet. Ken can see where Pink Shirt is working into the thick brush and holing up there off the path. No one can see Pink Shirt, but he can watch that path. Even Ken can't see Pink Shirt, but Ken knows just where the guy is.

Ken works his way around, taking it easy, very slow, not making a sound. He has plenty of time, and he hides among the trees maybe ten feet away from where Pink Shirt is hiding.

Ken waits a long time, and the moon gets higher and shines down through the leaves over the path. Pink Shirt hasn't moved once, not once that Ken has been able to see, but he's in there. Alone. In the dark. Feeling bigger and bigger and more powerful the longer he waits. Nobody around, nothing to make him feel naughty. Sometimes it takes guys like Pink Shirt weeks, months, even longer, to work up to this.

Now. There. The woman. She hesitates not over three feet from Ken. Now she starts nervously on down the path past where Pink Shirt's waiting. Ken can see her plainly in the moonlight. She has long legs, small sharp breasts. She's wearing a thin cotton dress and swinging a small straw basket. She's too old, too skinny maybe, but now it's dark and nobody's around and it doesn't make a damn bit of difference what they look like. She's a woman, and she's whatever Pink Shirt thinks she is. She's a woman, she's weak, and Pink Shirt's feeling more powerful by the second.

Ken sees Pink Shirt come out, soundlessly, crouching low in the shadows. She cries out feebly and swings the basket. Pink Shirt's face is transformed. It has a ferocious feral look and his eyes are shining. He rips the basket away, hurls it into the brush. She starts to run. She falls. She is on her hands and knees, trying to crawl, sobbing and gasping. Pink Shirt is down there with his arm around her neck. Ken hears Pink Shirt grunting. He can hear the woman's harsh breathing.

Ken crawls closer, but his legs are so weak he can hardly do this. He can see Pink Shirt and the woman in there moving. Ken's staring at them. He can feel the moisture thickening in his mouth, and his fingers digging into the gravel.

He watches the movement in there, the sounds, the skinny white legs exposed and kicking, and kicking more feebly and finally going limp. Later he can still hear her sobbing and Pink Shirt grunting.

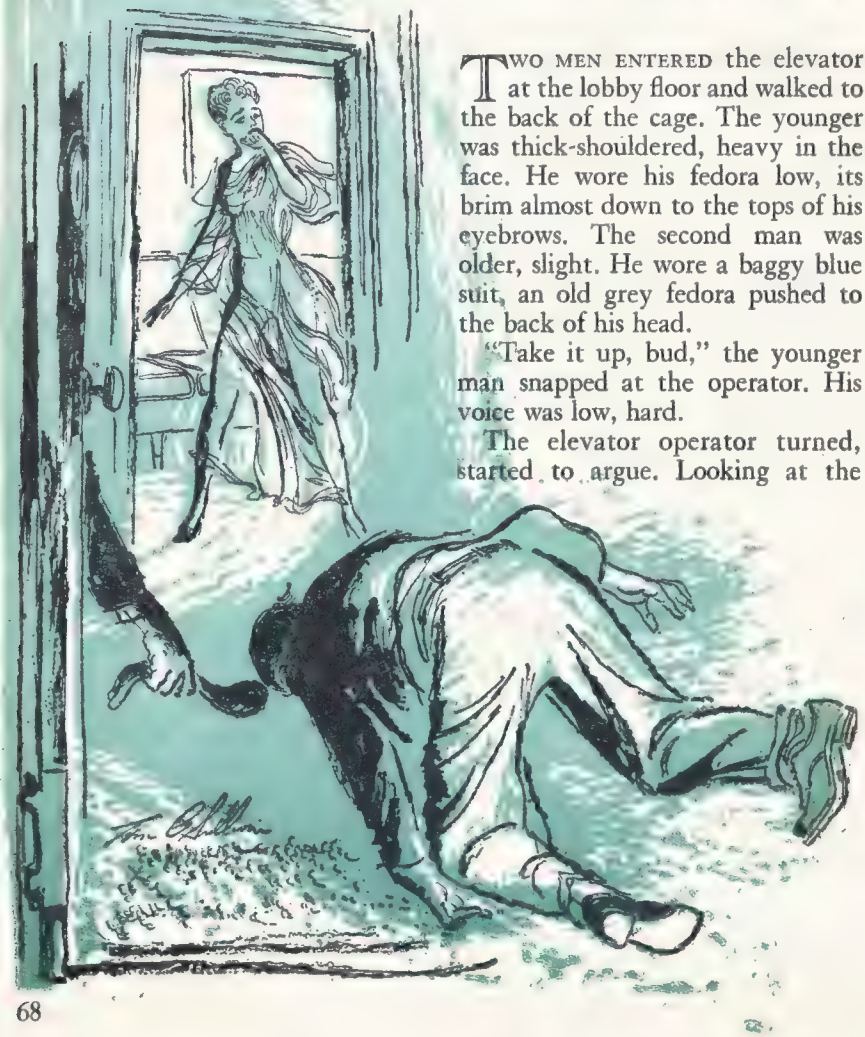
And before Pink Shirt can come and see him Ken leaves, walking silently in the dark night. It's all right now. Some guys look and look until the pressure boils up the way it has with Pink Shirt, and some guys just get their kicks out of watching, like Ken. Ken knows this and he knows that it's a good night. Everybody gets his kicks tonight.

Hollister was a killer. The cops shot him down in a gun battle. But then Liddell got word that Hollister had really been murdered . . .

The Dead Stand-In

A Johnny Liddell Novel

BY FRANK KANE



TWO MEN ENTERED the elevator at the lobby floor and walked to the back of the cage. The younger was thick-shouldered, heavy in the face. He wore his fedora low, its brim almost down to the tops of his eyebrows. The second man was older, slight. He wore a baggy blue suit, an old grey fedora pushed to the back of his head.

"Take it up, bud," the younger man snapped at the operator. His voice was low, hard.

The elevator operator turned, started to argue. Looking at the

man, he decided against it. He looked for support down to where the starter leaned against the glass counter of the cigar stand, in a perennially unsuccessful attempt to interest the blonde behind it. The starter had his back turned.

"We're in a hurry," the thick-shouldered man grunted. "Take it up."

The elevator boy slammed the gates, pushed down the handle. "What floor?"

"Four."

The two passengers leaned against the back wall, watched wordlessly as the floors slid past the grilled door. The cage wheezed to a jerky stop at the fourth, the operator dragged back the gate.

The younger of the two men caught his companion by the arm, held him back. "Let's check it first, Rosen." He flattened himself against the side of the cage, studied the length of the corridor through the mirror slanted against the top of the opposite wall.

The mirror showed an empty corridor.

The elevator operator watched with widening eyes as the man nodded to his companion, unbuttoned his jacket and tugged a .38 from his belt.

"Say, what is this, Mister?" he quavered.

The older man reassured him. "Police business, sonny. You stay back here in your cage and you won't get hurt." He nodded to his younger companion. "Let's go, Ryan."

The elevator boy wiped his slack lips with the back of his hands, looked as if he wished he was someplace else.

"Keep the cage on this floor," Ryan instructed him. "We may need it in a hurry." The gun in his hand looked dwarfed by the size of his fist.

The elevator boy tried to meet his eyes, didn't make it, managed to nod.

"Okay, Rosen."

Ryan led the way down the corridor to Room 416. He stopped outside the door, motioned his companion back against the wall on the far side. He flattened himself against the wall to the left.

"Open up, Hollister," he yelled.

There was a pause, then a voice. "What do you want?"

"Open up. It's the police!"

Hollister's answer was four muffled booms from inside the room. Slugs chewed holes in the panelling, ripped through the outside of the door, leaving long scars where the wood splintered.

Ryan waited a moment, then got in front of the door. He kicked his heel heavily against the door just below the lock. There was a rending of wood, the agonized screech of screws being torn out, and the door swung open.

"The window. He's heading for the window," Rosen grunted. He started through the door, there were

two loud cracks from outside the window. Rosen stumbled, went to his knees.

Behind him, Ryan cursed fervently, threw two shots at the dim figure on the fire escape beyond. The man on the landing staggered as the heavy slugs ripped into him. He tried to raise his gun to firing position. It had suddenly seemed to grow heavy.

Ryan sat the upper half of the man on the top of his front sight, squeezed the trigger twice more. The body of the man on the landing jerked again, the impact of the slugs threw him backwards. The railing caught him low: he seemed to be struggling for his balance, then he disappeared into space.

Somewhere a woman screamed. The screech reached for a high note, seemed to hang on the air, cut out suddenly.

Ryan bent over his fallen partner, turned him onto his back. He tore the sodden shirt away from a gaping wound in his chest and swore softly. The older man's eyelids fluttered, there was no other sign of life apart from the stream of red that seemed to spurt from the wound with everlessening vigor. Ryan laid him down gently, stepped out into the hall.

Doors had opened all the way down the corridor. Heads projected from each. At Ryan's appearance, gun in hand, they disappeared as though jerked back on a string.

"Hey, you," Ryan yelled down to the elevator operator. "Get downstairs and put in a call to homicide. There's a dead man in the courtyard and pretty soon there'll be another up here. Tell them to hustle an ambulance."

The elevator doors slammed shut, the cage rocketed towards the lobby.

Ryan walked into 416, closed the door after him. He knelt alongside the wounded man, determined that he hadn't regained consciousness. He walked over to the bed, pulled off a pillow and a blanket and made Rosen comfortable.

Then he proceeded to search the room thoroughly. Minutes later he found the thing he was looking for underneath the mattress of the bed. He picked it up, flipped through it and grunted his satisfaction.

The man on the floor opened his eyes, rolled them over to where Ryan stood. "Ryan," he croaked weakly.

The heavy set man walked over, knelt alongside his partner. "How do you feel, pal?" His hard voice sounded gentler. "Just hang on a little while. I've got an ambulance on its way."

The older man's grey-tinged face wrinkled into a passable semblance of a smile. "They better hurry. I'm hit real bad."

"You ought to see the other guy," Ryan consoled him. He lifted the soaked shirt from the wound, studied it. "They'll have you up on your feet in plenty of time to get your citation."

The older man's eyes dropped

from his partner's face to the wallet in his hand. "You found it?"

Ryan nodded. The hard look crept back into his eyes and voice. "I found it. It's Tommy Lorenzo's all right." He dropped the wallet into his jacket pocket, brought out a pack of cigarettes. "Smoke?"

Rosen nodded weakly. A thin pinkish dribble ran from the corner of his mouth.

Ryan pulled a handkerchief from his breast pocket, dried his partner's mouth. He lit a cigarette, stuck it between the slack lips. The man on the floor nodded his thanks as a dull, opaque look started to cloud his eyes. The cigarette fell from his mouth, rolled to the floor. His head sagged to the side.

Outside, there was a commotion in the hall. The elevator doors clanged open, a group of men in plain clothes piled out and started down the hall. Doors along the corridor opened again and heads were timidly pushed out.

"All right, folks, get to bed," one of the newcomers shouted. "Nothing to see here." He turned to one of his companions. "Get the halls cleared, Ed. Get them back to bed."

He walked to 416, pushed open the door. His eyes hopscotched from Ryan to the man on the floor and back. "You Ryan from Headquarters?"

The square-shouldered man nodded.

"Just got the word on you at the house." He looked down at the man on the floor. "The bus is on its way from Roosevelt. He going to make it?"

Ryan shook his head, stuck a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, touched a match to it. "He's gone. Fielded one in the lung."

The newcomer entered the room, closed the door behind him. "You call it in?"

"He just conked out." Ryan blew twin streams of grey white smoke from his nostrils. "You know about the one in the courtyard?"

The other man nodded. "The meat wagon's down there now." He walked over to the window, leaned on the sill, looked down into the floodlit space below. A group of men were huddled around a dark smear in the center of the court. As he watched, the group broke up and two men started transferring the dead man to a basket. He turned away from the window. "They could take him along, too."

Ryan scowled at him. "Ride the meat wagon with a rat like that? No dice. Rosen goes out the way he should go out — in a Department van."

The plain clothes man nodded.

2.

Johnny Liddell pushed his way through the frosted glass door that bore the inscription *Johnny Liddell, Private Investigation.* His redheaded secretary was in her customary place

behind the low, fenced-off enclosure. She was pecking away at the typewriter keys, taking care not to spoil the finish on her nails. She looked up as Liddell walked in, grinned.

He looked from her to the long wooden bench reserved for clients and prospective clients, he raised his eyebrows.

She shook her head. "Nobody. Not even a call."

Liddell tossed his hat at a coat tree, pushed through the gate set in the railing. "Some days it hardly pays to get out of bed." He walked over to where she sat, read the sheet in the typewriter over her shoulder. "What's that, your memoirs?"

"Well, you don't want me to be just sitting here in case a client does walk in, do you? I thought it'd look better if I seemed to be busy."

Liddell considered it, nodded. "Sounds reasonable."

He walked over to the door marked *Private* and pushed through. He made fast work of the small stack of envelopes on the corner of his desk, dropped five into the waste basket unopened. The sixth was an unmarked appeal for funds from a private charity group. He grunted, dropped it into the basket with the others, walked around the desk and dropped into his chair. From the bottom drawer of his desk, he pulled a bottle and a glass. He spilled some liquid into the glass and replaced the bottle in the drawer.

He picked up the remaining enveloped on his desk, held it up to the light. It contained only a folded piece of paper on which there was some typing. He debated throwing it away unopened, lost.

The note was short and to the point. "If you're interested in making five hundred dollars be in the rear booth of the Savoy Grill on Sixth Avenue at exactly 4 on Tuesday." Liddell read it twice, scowled at it.

The clock on the desk showed it to be almost two o'clock. His desk pad supplied the information that today was Tuesday. He picked up his glass off the desk, took a deep swallow. Then he re-read the note for the third time.

The Savoy Grill was an old speakeasy turned tavern at the birth of Repeal. Inside it had that cool, beery smell that characterized saloons in the days when the Sixth Avenue elevated shaded this side of the Avenue at four o'clock. The interior was dim, and a sixty-foot bar ran the length of the barroom. Even this early it was lined with customers. Narrow-lapelled executives from Radio City across the street rubbed elbows with the unlucky job seekers who still make the rounds of the second-story employment offices along the Avenue that haven't yet given up the ghost to the march of progress.

Instead of the smart steward's jacket many of the other bars around the town inflicted on their bartenders, the burly man behind the bar wore an ordinary shirt, a bow tie

and suspenders. A butcher's apron was tied around his ample waist and he was pardonably proud of the way he could slide a filled glass of draught beer the length of the bar.

On the far wall, an old fashioned Seth Thomas clock showed the time to be 3:48. Liddell stood in the doorway, squinted into the dimness of the room. No one seemed to pay him undue attention. He found himself room at the bar, ordered a bourbon on the rocks. While the man behind the bar was filling a glass with ice and spilling bourbon over it, Liddell turned his back to the bar, checked the occupants of the booths.

Only one of the four booths was occupied. An elderly man in a charcoal grey suit, pink shirt and knitted black tie was rubbing knees under the small table with what appeared to be his secretary. The other booths were empty.

He dropped a bill on the bar, picked up his drink and walked to the end booth. It was cool, the seats were comfortably upholstered, the drink was good. Even so, by 4:15 he was beginning to get restless.

He stubbed out his third cigarette, consulted his watch, and decided to give his client leeway of one more drink. A waiter was heading in his direction, he flagged him down.

"Is your name Liddell?" the waiter wanted to know when he stopped by the booth.

"Yeah."

"There's a phone call for you." He pointed to a row of phone booths at the back of the room. "A lady."

Liddell nodded, slid out from the booth. "Bring me a bourbon on the rocks back there, will you?"

He headed for the phone booth in which the door was half closed, the receiver dangling from its cord. He caught it up, held it to his ear.

"This is Liddell."

The voice on the other end was female. Sultry and disturbing female. "I'm sorry to be late, Mr. Liddell. I was detained."

"I can wait a little while longer. How much longer will you be?"

"I'm not coming over there," the voice told him. "We can handle this by phone."

Liddell started to growl into the mouthpiece, was interrupted by the waiter with his drink. He pushed open the door, accepted the glass. "Look, lady, if we're going to do business, we do it face to face. I came over to meet you. I'll be here, and if —"

"Wait, don't go." There was a note of urgency in her voice. "I can't show in this right now." She paused for a moment. "If anyone knew I was hiring you. I'd be dead in less than twenty-four hours."

Liddell scowled at the mouthpiece for a second. "Nobody needs to know. You can trust me to —"

"I know I can. But you don't know what I'm up against." Her voice dropped to a husky whisper. "Hear me out first, then if you don't want the case, I won't blame you."

"I'll listen. But with no guar-

antee." He took a swallow from his glass.

"Thank you." There was a soft intake of breath from the other end of the wire. "I want you to find the man who killed Larry Hollister."

Liddell paused with his glass halfway to his lips. "Hollister?" He frowned down at his drink for a moment. "Isn't that the hood who killed a cop and was burned down by the cop's partner?"

There was a bitter laugh at the other end. "That's the way the papers had it. I know better, Liddell, Hollister was murdered."

"Then it must have been by the cop. I recall the case pretty well. Hollister tried to shoot it out with a plainclothesman and didn't make it. You can't spell murder that way."

The note of urgency was back in the girl's voice. "I don't care how it was rigged to look. I tell you Larry was murdered. All I want you to do is to take a look at it with an open mind."

Liddell pinched his nostrils with his thumb and forefinger. "If I do take the case, do I get to know who's hiring me?"

"That's not necessary."

"It might be. You may know some things I should know."

The girl on the other end laughed throatily. "Then you find them out. You're the detective. That's what I'm hiring you for."

Liddell swirled the liquor around his glass. "Suppose I do look into it and find out I was right the first time? Suppose I'm convinced Hollister was just a gun-crazy hood who was burned down resisting arrest?"

"Then you keep the fee."

Liddell grinned. "How do you know I'll even try?"

"I've been in town almost three months. I've done a lot of checking. I'm willing to take a chance on you."

"I should know where to contact you," Liddell argued.

"I just told you. It's not necessary."

"Where do I send the receipt for the fee? Where do I report my progress if any?"

"I don't need a receipt. And from what I've heard about you, I'll be able to keep tabs on your progress just by reading the papers."

Liddell scowled at the mouthpiece. "How come you had to get me all the way down here to make the deal by phone? Why not make it over the phone in my office?"

"Two reasons. After all I heard about you, I wanted a chance to look you over myself—"

Liddell held his hand over the mouthpiece, stuck his head out of the door of the booth and looked around. He could see no other phones, nor was there anybody outside the bar who could be observing him. "—and secondly," the voice continued, "if you decide not to take the job, I didn't want to take the chance that our conversation might be recorded in some way. The people I'm fighting might recognize my voice."

Liddell waved a waiter over. "Are there any other phone booths in here?"

The waiter shook his head.

"Liddell, are you listening?"

He stuck his head back into the booth. "I'm just thinking it over."

The receiver laughed at him. "If you're looking for me at the Savoy, you're wasting your time. I left there fifteen minutes ago."

Liddell handed his empty glass to the waiter, signalled for a refill. "You mentioned something about a fee?" he said.

"It will be delivered to your office in an hour along with anything I have here that may be of help to you in finding the killer."

"Do you have anything?"

There was a brief pause. "Nothing that would convince the police. Or even you."

3.

It was almost 5:30 when Johnny Liddell walked into the city room of the *Dispatch.* Already approaching deadline had stepped up the tempo in the room, phones shrilling as the leg men called in their stories, typewriters chattering as the rewrite men pounded the bare facts into tomorrow's news.

Johnny Liddell picked his way through the organized confusion, headed for the city desk where Jim Kiely presided. The city editor pushed his green eyeshade to the top of his head, grinned crookedly at the private detective. Jim Kiely was a thin, hollow-cheeked man with piercingly curious eyes. The eyes jumped from Liddell to the clock with which he fought a daily battle to the deadline every evening at seven. The clock stared back at him blandly, impervious to the rapidly increasing crescendo of the teletype pings, telephone shrillings, typewriter chatter. Every night they fought the same battle, every night the clock emerged triumphant. Tonight would be the same.

Liddell grasped the gnarled claw the newspaperman shoved at him.

Kiely shook his hand free to pick up two typewritten pages of copy a boy stuck on his spindle. His eyes skipped along the lines, spotted Teddy Levin in the slot.

"Tell Teddy to translate this into English," he growled at the boy. "Bite it off at the end of one page and slug it for the second section." He turned back to Liddell. "What's on your mind, Johnny?"

Liddell grinned at him. "I won't take up much of your time, Jim. I just want to talk to the guy who covered that cop kill in the Hotel Leeway about six months ago."

Kiely's brow ridged for a moment. Liddell could almost hear the filing cabinet drawers in the newspaperman's mind opening.

"Cop named Rosen was killed? Shot it out with a mugger."

Liddell nodded. "Guy named Hollister, right?"

The interest faded from Kiely's

face, his eyes crept back to the clock. "It was an open and shut deal, Johnny. The cops had Hollister pinned in, he tried to shoot his way out. Rosen stopped one and his partner evened it up." His eyes darted around the city room. "Casey Dennis covered for us, but he's out in Indiana doing an on-the-scene at that wife killing. He's ghosting the Scotland Yard expert for us."

Liddell nodded. Okay if I prowl the morgue?"

Kiely forgot the clock momentarily. "What cooks? Anything in it for us?"

Liddell shook his head. "Screwball stuff, I think. I've got a client says Hollister was murdered."

The newspaperman snorted, yanked some copy off his hook, started slugging it. "That's away out in left field. Tell Pop I said it was okay for you to dig. I'll verify as soon as the pile-up eases." He snapped the eyeshade back into position, seemed to forget that Liddell was there.

Now the copy really started to pile in from the district men, from City Hall, from the wire services. Copy boys who had been crawling minutes ago now were scooting through aisles between desks with copy in one hand, galleys in another. Cigarettes lay on the edges of desks, adding service stripes as they burned down through what was left of the varnish. Half filled paper containers of coffee grew cold as the desks rattled under the stepped-up pounding of the many old typewriters.

Liddell edged his way toward the door, stopped at Muggsy Kiely's desk long enough to scrawl a note on a sheet of copy paper. He stuck it into her typewriter, waved to Les Marcus at a nearby desk. Marcus stared right through him, his lips forming the words of the story he was punching into shape for the first edition. Liddell recognized the absent stare as a symptom of the disease that struck all good newspapermen at almost the same time every day — deadlinitis. He felt like an outsider, an intruder from another world, as he edged his way out into the corridor.

Here some degree of normalcy was recaptured. People still seemed to walk, find time to stop and talk. The business department of a newspaper does not suffer the same extreme pangs of deadlinitis that afflicts the editorial side. Its function, like that of an expectant father, is to perform its services early and sit and wait with the hope that the other partner brings forth a suitable result for its labors at the appointed time.

Liddell nodded to a couple of space salesmen he knew, headed for the morgue of the Dispatch. It was housed in the basement of the building, the last resting place of dead news, dead speeches and dead personalities. Yesterday they were all hot but, since nothing is colder than yesterday's news, today appropriately enough they all end up in the morgue.

Pop Totter presided over the row on row of fireproof filing cabinets with fierce devotion. His staff filed upwards of 2,000 clippings a week, clippings garnered not only from the Dispatch and its daily competitors but from other periodicals and publications. In his files every printed fact about every recognizable character was interred in large manila envelopes that bore not only the character's name, but cross references to every other identifiable character with whom he had had contact.

The old man pulled a battered briar from between his teeth, grinned a welcome to Liddell. "Hello, Johnny. What are they doing, farming you out to the dead-file beat?"

"The way business has been lately, even that'd be a pleasure, Pop." Liddell walked up to where the old man leaned with both elbows on the counter that separated the files from the rest of the room. "Jim Kiely get through to you yet?"

The old man's eyes rolled up to the big clock on the wall. "This close to deadline?" He stuck the pipe back between his teeth, rattled the juice in the bowl. "He wouldn't talk to the Queen of England between now and 7:30, let alone a broken down ex-leg man." His shrewd little eyes studied Liddel. "What was he supposed to call about?"

"I wanted to go through the clips on a guy named Hollister. Larry Hollister. Make him?"

The old man sucked on his dead pipe for a moment, pulled it from between his teeth, knocked the dottle to the floor. "A gun. Chilled a headquarters man on his way out." He pulled a pouch from his hip pocket, dug the bowl of the pipe into it, and started packing tobacco with the tip of his index finger. "Why should you be interested in a character like that?"

"Just curious. Any objections to my seeing the file?"

Pop pursed his lips, considered. Then shook his head. "It's your time if you want to waste it." He pushed a printed form across the counter. "Just sign the slip and put a note that Kiely sent you down." He stuck the pipe back in his mouth, scratched a wooden match on the under side of the counter and sucked the pipe into life. "You want the cross sheets, too?"

Liddell scribbled his name on the form, nodded. "Might as well."

Pop filled out the rest of the form, initialled it. "Can't figure what you want with a no-good character like him," he complained. He shuffled back towards the files, trailing a cloud of blue-grey smoke in his wake.

In a few moments he was back with four large manila folders. "Hollister," the old man tossed one folder on the counter. "Ryan, that's the headquarters dick who stopped him." He added the second folder. "Rosen, that's the dead dick." He dropped the third folder, studied the nota-

tion on the fourth. "And Tommy Lorenzo. That's the guy Hollister killed in the stickup." He pushed the four folders towards Liddell. "Be my guest."

"Thanks. One more favor?"

The old man nodded.

"Can I call my office?"

"The phone's down at the end of the counter. Dial 9 and ask for an outside wire."

The redhead in Liddell's office answered on the first ring. Hello, Pink. Anything stirring?"

"Yeah. A messenger came with an envelope for you. Said you were expecting it. I didn't know where to reach you."

"I'm in the morgue at the *Dispatch*."

He could hear the sniff across the wire. "And here I thought you might be working. Doesn't that female Richard Harding Davis even give you breathing time?"

"I am working. I'm checking on a guy. That's what that message was about. Did you open it?"

"That's a fine crack. You know I don't stick my nose into —"

"Open it," he cut her off.

There was a slight pause, then Pinky's voice came back. "Hey, there's a beautiful message here — two brand new century notes. They're real, aren't they?"

"I hope so. No note of any kind with it?"

"Not a note. Just a little typewritten slip. It says two hundred on account. Do we get more?"

"Yeah. Look, I'll be here for the next hour or so. If nothing comes up that you need me for, I'll check you in the morning." He tossed the receiver back on the hook, picked up the manila envelopes and headed for a large library table.

An hour later, he straightened his cramped back, started shovelling piles of clippings back into each of the envelopes. When the table was cleared, he leaned back, lit a cigarette and glared at them. The envelopes represented facts, cold hard facts. Yet, the facts left him puzzled, because, like the girl whose voice had been loaded with emotion over the phone, something about them struck a false note. The facts were there, neatly tabulated and carefully compiled — but he had the undefinable impression that the facts had been manufactured to tell a prefabricated story.

4.

Outside the *Dispatch*, Johnny Liddell flagged down a southbound cab, gave the address of headquarters and settled back against the cushions. The cabby threaded the big car in and out of traffic with the ease born of long experience.

At Centre Street, he swung the cab out of a slow moving stream with such violence that it banged its front wheel against the curb, skidded to a stop. Liddell pushed a bill through the half-opened window. He crossed the sidewalk, entered

headquarters and headed for the Homicide Division.

Inspector Herlehy had a cubbyhole office on the fourth floor with a window overlooking the courtyard. He was standing at the window, staring down onto the court, when Liddell walked in.

The inspector turned, nodded to the private detective, walked over to where he stood with outstretched hand. "Long time no see, Johnny." He was tall, slender. A thick shock of white hair showed signs of having been raked with his fingers. His jaws were pounding on an ever-present wad of gum. "What brings you around?"

"I need some help. Inspector." He dug a cigarette from his pocket, hung it in the corner of his mouth where it waggled when he talked. "And I may be able to give you some."

"Sit down." The inspector walked around his oversize desk and dropped into his arm chair. "What's it all about?"

Liddell pulled his chair closer to the desk, sat down. "One of your men. An inspector's man named Ryan."

A troubled V appeared between the white haired man's eyebrows. "Mike Ryan? What about him?"

"I've been going through the clips on him in the *Dispatch* morgue. He's a pretty handy guy with a gun. I counted eight kills for Ryan and a dozen more times he pulled his gun and started shooting. That's a lot of gunplay for one lone cop."

"Maybe he's in a spot where he goes up against more gunmen than the average cop." Herlehy picked a fresh stick of gum from his drawer, denuded it. "In all of the killings it was self defense. Ryan has five departmental citations." He spat the old wad of gum at the waste basket, stuck the fresh stick between his powerful teeth. "What's he supposed to do? Stand there and let some gun-happy hood shoot him up on sight?"

"How about Larry Hollister?"

"How about him? A killer and a gunman. Ryan burned him down, but not before Hollister had killed Ryan's partner." The inspector scowled at him. "How about Hollister, Liddell?"

Liddell ran the heel of his hand along the side of his jaw. "I read the story. This Hollister was a killer, the paper said."

Herlehy nodded. "Killed a guy named Lorenzo. Stuck him up and killed him. In cold blood."

"You're sure of that, of course?"

"Of course we're sure," Herlehy growled at him. He got up from his desk, stamped across the room to where the water cooler stood humming to itself, drew himself a drink. "When they broke down the door to his room, Lorenzo's wallet was under the mattress." He drained the paper cup, crushed it and threw it in the wastebasket. "Now suppose you level with me." He walked back to the desk, stared down at Liddell. "What kind of a picture are you

trying to dream up? From here, I don't like the sound."

"You know me better than that, inspector," Liddell growled. "You know I wouldn't have any part of a gimmick to smear a cop." He took a last drag on his cigarette, crushed it out in the tray on the inspector's desk. "But something about Hollister's killing doesn't ring true."

A dull red flush was starting to climb into the inspector's face from his neck. "You start talking like that about my men, Liddell, and you're going to have to prove it. Now a cop can't even shoot back at a killer who's murdered his partner without someone trying to smell it up. Okay, you said your little piece, now back it up or get out of here."

"I'm not saying anything about any of your men," Liddell sighed. "I'm just saying there's something funny about the whole set-up and I think it's to your advantage as much as any one else's to find out what it is."

"Maybe I'm getting old, but I don't find anything funny about one of my men getting gunned out. Especially a man like Rosen." Herlehy walked around the desk, dropped into his chair, stared at Liddell with unfriendly eyes.

"Did you know this Larry Hollister, Inspector?"

Herlehy shook his head. "He was an out-of-towner. Had a record as long as your arm in Detroit. Six homicides, none proven. Or maybe you think we dreamed that up?"

"I read his record in the files. He was a killer. I'm not denying that. I'm not denying that he had it coming to him. I'm just questioning how he got it. Or why."

Herlehy was giving the wad of gum an unmerciful beating, his thick fingers began to drum restlessly on the edge of the desk. "What do you mean why? Should we have given him a medal for killing a guy in a holdup and then burning down one of our best men?"

"Look, will you get off the defensive? If I were looking to start a stink, I wouldn't be here, would I? I want to work with you, not against you." Liddell jerked a cigarette from his pocket, jammed it between his lips. "Pull the package on Hollister. Check the M.O. file and see if it doesn't begin to smell a little to you, too."

Herlehy stared at him for a moment, then lifted the receiver off its hook. "Get me Lieutenant Michaels in Identification." His eyes stared at Liddell unblinkingly. "Mike? Herlehy. Pull the package on Larry Hollister. He's in the deceased file. Yeah, that's the one. How soon can I have it? Good." He tossed the receiver back on its hook, jabbed at a button on the base of the phone.

A uniformed cop stuck his head in the door. "Get up to Identification, Ray. Michaels has a package for you. Bring it right down."

The cop nodded, his head disappeared from the door. Herlehy scowled at Liddell, got up from his

chair, walked over to the window and stared down into the courtyard. He was still there when the young patrolman arrived with the Hollister file.

"Thanks, Ray." Herlehy walked over to the desk, waited until the patrolman had closed the door behind him, looked over to Liddell. "All right. Here's the full file Stats got on Hollister from Detroit. When do I begin getting a whiff of this odor you're talking about?"

"Right now, I hope." Liddell got up, crushed out his cigarette. "Look inspector, we've got to both start with the assumption that the MO file is pretty nearly infallible." He looked up at Herlehy, waited. "Agreed?"

The inspector nodded irritably. "About as infallible as any method of detection that depends on the officers classifying the information," he hedged.

Liddell grinned. "Let's put it this way, then. Ever since Vollmer introduced the system into this country it's been used by leading departments throughout the country."

Herlehy had difficulty restraining his impatience. "What's that got to do with accusing one of my men of being a killer?"

"I'm just trying to point out that the one thing the MO system has established is that the way a criminal commits an offense is as individual to him as the way a painter uses a brush or a bookkeeper keeps his records, or —"

Herlehy stared at him thoughtfully for a moment. "Go on."

"I've made my point. Take a look at the MO file on Hollister. One homicide after another and all paid killings. But no matter how closely you study the file you won't find a single case of a stickup in his arm-long record. How about it, inspector? Is the MO system out of whack — or is this killing a little off center?"

Herlehy stared at Liddell for a moment, then he picked up the record on Hollister. His eyes ran down the list of offenses, a frown ridged his forehead. After a moment, he flipped the sheet back onto the desk. "I see what you mean," he nodded.

Some of the tenseness drained out of Liddell's face, he wiped a thin film of perspiration from his upper lip with the side of his hand. "I'm glad you do, inspector."

Herlehy massaged the ridges out of his forehead with the tips of his fingers. "What's your angle in this, Liddell?"

"I've got a client. A client I don't know who insists that Hollister was murdered in cold blood."

"I won't buy that," Herlehy flared. "Lorenzo's wallet was there. You can't get around that. And Rosen's dead. You can't get around that, either."

"A wallet could be planted, an accidental slug could have tagged Rosen." He raised his hands placatingly. "I'm not saying that's what happened. I'm just saying it could."

"Sure you are," the white-haired man snapped. "But just so you don't start getting ideas, I'm going to find out just what did happen."

5.

The bull pen was a long, brightly-lit room in the rear of the fourth floor. A railing separated the small waiting space from the main room. A profusion of desks, back to back and lit by a common lamp, was scattered around the room in organized confusion. Rows of filing cabinets lined the walls. At some of the desks, men sat in shirtsleeves, laboring away at reports with one-fingered typing. At the railing, a plainclothesman, his fedora still on the back of his head, was conversing in low tones with a dark-skinned man who had "informer" written all over him.

Inspector Herlehy pushed through the door leading from the corridor, Liddell trailing behind him. He nodded to the officer talking to the informer, led the way through the gate in the railing into the bull pen.

Mike Ryan looked up from a report he was correcting when the inspector stopped alongside his desk. His face didn't change expression as his eyes rolled from the inspector to Liddell and back.

"The lieutenant in, Ryan?" Herlehy wanted to know.

Ryan nodded, glanced toward the partitioned corner space. "In his office, inspector."

"Pull your personal package and meet me in there," Herlehy snapped at him. He nodded for Liddell to follow, headed for the lieutenant's office.

Lieutenant Bob Silloway was a tired looking man who managed to look mild in the face of a reputation for toughness. He was sitting behind a small unpainted desk, poring over a mass of reports. He looked up with a scowl at being disturbed, the scowl faded when he recognized Herlehy. "Evening, skipper." He studied Liddell curiously.

"I told Ryan to pull his package and bring it in," Herlehy told him without preliminaries.

"Anything special?" Silloway leaned back, laced his fingers behind his head. "Mike's been pretty quiet lately."

"The Hollister kill," Herlehy pulled a straight backed wooden chair from the wall, set it at the end of the desk, and sat down. "Liddell here brought up a couple of interesting points. I think we ought to get the answer to them," he sighed, "before the papers do."

"Liddell?" Silloway's voice was deceptively mild. "A private cop, aren't you?" He managed to say the last few words as though they tasted bad. "And what are the points you want cleared up?"

"He doesn't want them cleared up. I do." Herlehy snapped.

The Lieutenant nodded. "Sorry. What are the points?"

"The MO file shows Hollister was always a hired gun, never a stickup

man. Somebody has hired Liddell to prove that Hollister was murdered, and not killed in self-defense."

Silloway's nostrils flared, hard lines appeared between the ends of his nostrils and the corners of his mouth. Two hard lumps formed on the sides of his jaw. Slowly, almost deliberately, he unlaced his hands from the back of his neck, laid them flat on his desk and leaned forward. "He's a liar."

"That's what we're here to prove," Herlehy snapped. He motioned Liddell to a chair. "Nobody gains anything by calling names. Liddell came to us instead of going to the newspapers with this. All I want is for it to be cleared up."

There was a rap on the door. Silloway looked to the inspector, drew a nod. "Come on in, Mike."

The door opened and Mike Ryan walked in. He dropped a manila folder on the lieutenant's desk, let his eyes hopscotch around the room. "Any reason I can't know what this is all about?"

"We've got some questions about the Hollister kill, Mike." Silloway told him. He leaned back, stared glumly at the plainclothesman. "The inspector wants a fill-in on what happened that night."

Ryan nodded, opened his folder, selected a typewritten flimsy. He held it out to the inspector. Herlehy took it from between his fingers, glanced through the single-space typing, flapped it back on the desk. "I'd rather we talked it out. You can refer to your report to refresh your memory." He studied the man in front of him. "You ever heard of Hollister before that night, Ryan?"

Ryan wrinkled his brow, shook his head.

"Then you don't know his record?"

The plainclothesman shook his head again.

Herlehy leaned back in his chair, touched the tips of his fingers across his stomach. "Hollister had a record as long as your arm. Mostly homicides, all paid jobs. Mean anything to you?"

Ryan considered, shrugged. "Explains why he started throwing lead the minute we identified ourselves as police."

"Mean anything else?"

"No. Should it?"

Herlehy nodded. "It means the holdup he's supposed to have committed was out of character for him. Like a second story man suddenly going in for car socking." He squinted at the detective. "What made you go to Hollister's room if you never heard of him?"

"A squeal. Some joker phoned in, said if we wanted the mugger that killed Lorenzo, we should pick him up in 416 at the Leeway."

Liddell dug a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, held it out to the lieutenant, drew an icy stare. He selected one himself, lit it and settled back.

"On an anonymous squeal, you went up to a hotel room and started

shooting?" Herlehy growled coldly.

"We knocked on the door and identified ourselves. When he started shooting through the door, we kicked it in. He was on the fire escape pitching. Rosen caught one and I brought the creep down." He looked around, his eyes hard. "So what's wrong with that?"

"This wallet you found. Where was it?"

"Under the mattress. I checked it and it belonged to Lorenzo, the guy who'd been killed in the stickup. That cinched it for me."

"What made you look for the wallet, Ryan?"

Ryan's face screwed up into a puzzled scowl. "The guy that phoned in the squeal. He tipped Rosen."

"Rosen?"

The plainclothesman nodded. "Rosen was taking squeals that night. He said the guy tipped him we'd find the killer with the goods. He said the guy in 416 even had Lorenzo's wallet. While I was waiting for Homicide I turned it up."

Herlehy nodded. He bit thoughtfully on the cuticle of his thumb. "There was no witness that the wallet was actually in the room?"

The plainclothesman's fists clenched and unclenched at his sides. "What's that supposed to mean, inspector?"

"Don't flip. I'm just asking questions some smart newspaper reporter might ask," Herlehy grunted. "Somebody's trying to make it look like Hollister was murdered. They're even pointing out that since Hollister is known as a hired gun and not as a stickup artist, the wallet might have been planted to justify the kill."

A mirthless grin twisted the corners of Ryan's lips upward. The smile did not reach his eyes.

"They might have trouble doing that, inspector."

"Why?"

"The wallet was turned over to the lab boys and dusted. They brought out a bunch of latents. Some belonged to the guy Lorenzo. But some belonged to Hollister."

Herlehy looked up, some of the worry drained out of his face. "Is that in the report?"

Ryan nodded, held out the report, underscored a paragraph with his thumb nail. "There's also a supplementary filed by the lab." He looked at Liddell for the first time, a long, unfriendly look. "That means that the wallet couldn't have been planted. I never got close enough to Hollister before he took off over the railing to fake prints, and the wallet went to the lab before I left 416."

6.

Muggsy Kiely answered the door in response to his knock. She was wearing a blue silk dressing gown that clung to a figure well worth the clinging. She stood aside as Liddell walked in, closed the door after him.

"Better late than never, I always say," she pouted. She glanced down

at the tiny baguette on her wrist. "Correct me if I am wrong. The note you left in my typewriter said you'd pick me up for dinner."

Liddell nodded, tossed his hat on an end table, dropped morosely onto the couch. "Don't you start in on me, too, Muggs. I've had my share of getting chewed out tonight."

Muggsy sniffed unsympathetically. She was short in her heelless slippers. Her red hair was piled on the top of her head, her face was bare of make-up except for a light application of lipstick. A thin sprinkle of freckles bridged a perky, tip-tilted nose. She followed him into the room, perched on the arm of a big chair. "Who was first on line?"

"The whole damn police department." He leaned back, his head against the top of the couch, stared at the sand-finished ceiling. "It seems I'm no longer popular in Centre Street."

"There, too? What'd you do to them?"

"I hinted that maybe the Hollister kill was a setup."

"The Hollister kill?" Muggsy wrinkled her nose in concentration. "You mean the cop killer?"

Liddell nodded. "The thing didn't smell kosher to me, so I started asking embarrassing questions." He looked down from the ceiling to the girl, grinned sheepishly. "Imagine my embarrassment when they trotted out the right answers."

"How to make friends and influence people. Lesson number ten." The redhead shook her head, walked towards the kitchen. "I suppose it would only be an act of charity to get you a drink instead of telling you what I've been rehearsing to say for the past hour."

Liddell picked a cigarette from the humidor on the table, had it lit by the time Muggsy re-appeared carrying a bottle, two glasses and some ice. She set them down on the coffee table in front of him, stood there for a moment, hands on hips, studying him curiously.

"What got you off on that kick?"

Liddell shrugged. "A client. She claimed she knew Hollister was supposed to have killed Tommy Lorenzo in a holdup. Mugging or stick-ups aren't in Hollister's line, so I figured maybe the wallet Ryan was supposed to have found in the room was planted."

"I suppose you also had it figured out that Ryan killed his partner so he couldn't squeal?" She took the cigarette from his hand, took a long, deep drag and replaced it between his fingers. The smoke dribbled from between her half-parted lips. "Mike Ryan may not be the most sporting guy wearing a badge, but he was close to Mickey Rosen." She held up her index finger with the third finger lapped over it. "That close."

"So I heard." He reached over, dropped three ice cubes into each glass, spilled bourbon over them. He took a last drag on the cigarette, crushed it out, then leaned back, glass in hand. "I still can't help feel-

ing there's something fishy about the whole thing."

Muggsy considered it for a moment, speared a minute fleck of tobacco from the tip of her tongue with her fingernail. Finally, she shook her head. "I can't buy hunch, Johnny."

"That makes it practically unanimous," he growled.

Muggsy picked up her glass, walked over to a big arm chair, sank into it. She sipped at her drink, looked thoughtfully over the rim. "Who is this client of yours?"

Liddell shrugged irritably. "I don't know. I've never seen her."

"Break that down for me?"

"I've never seen her. She set the job up over the phone."

Muggsy stared at him with open mouth. "You're probably being had by some practical joker. Somebody's sitting in a corner getting a big yok out of you going up against the police department's number one public hero."

"Practical jokers who get up five hundred for their yoks should come around more often." He took a deep swallow from his glass, set it down. "This is no rib, baby. Somebody really believes Hollister was murdered. Somebody who probably knows a helluva lot more about it than any of us."

"That still doesn't explain away the fact that Hollister was involved in Tommy Lorenzo's killing. They satisfied you that the wallet hadn't been planted?"

Liddell nodded. "Hollister's fingerprints were all over it. If it had been a plant, they couldn't have been." He picked up his glass, swirled the liquor around the sides. "Hollister had that wallet, all right. And probably the only way he could have gotten it would be to kill Lorenzo."

"So what's it prove?"

"It proves the damn MO system isn't worth the paper it's printed on. It means that a guy can specialize in hired kills all his life, and still—" He broke off, stared down at his glass.

"Still what?"

Liddell held his hand up, cut her off. He ridged his brow in concentration, finally he snapped his fingers. "Brother, am I thick!"

"Now what?"

He drained his glass, set it down. "Hollister was murdered. He was murdered in cold blood just like my client said."

"Oh, brother. You keep making noises like that and Centre Street is going to take you apart like a fifty-cent watch. We're going to miss that license of yours around here."

Liddell paid no attention to the interruption. "Hollister was a hired killer, right? He was a specialist and an expert in his line. A guy with a background like that wouldn't stoop to a lousy holdup."

"Knocking Tommy Lorenzo over wasn't exactly sticking up a piggy bank. Tommy always went heeled."

Liddell waved aside the objection. "Let's take for granted the MO system is infallible and that a hired killer like Hollister keeps right on being a hired killer. Somebody wants to buy the Big One for Tommy Lorenzo and he imports Hollister to punch his ticket."

Muggsy stared at him for a moment, set her glass down on the floor next to her chair. "Go on."

"Part of the deal is that Hollister take Lorenzo's wallet, maybe as proof that he did the job, maybe because the guy that hired him said there was something in it that he needed. Follow me?"

Muggsy nodded wordlessly.

"Good," Liddell grunted. "Now we've explained away the wallet. Now, who knew he had the wallet? The guy that hired him, of course."

Muggsy leaned back in her chair, caught her lower lip between her teeth, shook her head. "Now you're back to Mike Ryan again. I tell you, Johnny, you can't make that stick. Ryan would never have —"

"I'm not back to Mike Ryan," he growled. "I'm back to the real killer."

"Mike Ryan killed him. Ballistics and everybody else —"

"He fired the shots, sure. But somebody else killed Hollister as sure as if he had squeezed the trigger. The guy who hired him to kill Lorenzo."

"I got lost on the first turn. Give it to me again, real slow."

Liddell reached over, splashed some fresh bourbon into his glass. "It's so beautifully simple." He hit his forehead with the flat of his hand. "How could I have missed it?" He took a deep swallow from his glass. "Look, I want Tommy Lorenzo chilled for some reason — any reason. I'm no killer, so I hire an experienced gun to do the job."

"Hollister." Muggsy nodded her comprehension.

"Right. Part of the deal is that Hollister must have Lorenzo's wallet when I come to his hotel for the pay-off. Follow that?" Muggsy nodded. "Now I know Mike Ryan's reputation. He's a hair-trigger guy who'd rather shoot it out with his prisoners than to bring them in on their feet."

"Leave Ryan out of it and get to the point."

"Okay. I've got Hollister in his room with evidence that he was the guy that killed Lorenzo. So I phone a tip to Mike Ryan where he can find this killer and cop himself some glory."

Muggsy chewed on her thumb nail, nodded. "It figures."

Liddell snapped his fingers excitedly. "So how do I cinch my bet? I wait until I see Ryan and his partner go into the hotel, then I call my boy Hollister and tell him I've got a tip the cops are after him, with orders to shoot to kill. Ryan pounds on his door, calls out he's police. Hollister tries to shoot his way out."

Muggsy considered it, nodded

again. "So your client would be right. Hollister was murdered, but it was a sure-thing murder." She shook her head. "It fits all the facts, Johnny, but it's still a guess. There's not a chance of proving any part of it."

"That's where you are wrong, Muggs. For the first time, I've got a lead. I know where I am going."

"So do I. And you're going to look pretty silly in stripes."

"How thick can you be? Now we know that Hollister isn't the key to the thing. Lorenzo is." He leaned forward, pounded his fist on his knee. "Hollister's kill was only incidental. Sort of a mopping-up deal. Lorenzo was the boy our killer was buying the shroud for."

"I see what you mean."

"Sure. All we have to do is work on the assumption that Lorenzo was knocked off purposely. The cops brushed the kill because it looked like a routine stickup. When Hollister was tagged with the job and Lorenzo's wallet turned up, they marked it closed and the killer took a deep breath. While he's still patting himself on the back for being so cute, maybe we can move in on him."

"You're not going to let Herlehy in on it?"

Liddell grinned glumly. "Not until I have a lot more to hand him than I have now. He's a little sensitive on the subject." He picked up a fresh cigarette, lit it. "What do you know about Tommy Lorenzo?"

The redhead got up from her chair, brought her glass over to the coffee table. She picked up a cigarette from the humidor, chain-lit it from the one in Liddell's mouth. "I've bumped into him around, but I never knew him too well. He wasn't exactly my type." She blew a stream of feathery smoke at the ceiling, squinted through it. "He was the kind of a guy that asked for killing, I guess. Everybody hated him, but most of the people he dealt with were too afraid of him to show it."

"Women?"

"By the carload. He practically had them working in shifts." She studied the carmined end of her cigarette with distaste. "He was the kind of a creepy sadist that would do anything to break anybody who stood up against him. If a girl turned him down, he'd find some way to bring her to her knees and keep her there."

"It might have been one of his women that bought the one-way ticket for him."

"Couldn't we check with Ryan and find out who phoned in the tip about Hollister being holed up in the hotel?"

"Wouldn't do any good. He wouldn't know."

"Why not?"

"Rosen was taking the squeals that night. The report Ryan turned in just said an unidentified informant telephoned information regarding Hollister."

Muggsy frowned. She walked over to the window, looked down on the string of lights that represented Central Park many stories below. "That sort of leaves us out in left field. Where do we start?"

"We start with the assumption that we're looking for the murderer of Tommy Lorenzo, not of Larry Hollister. Because when we find one we've got both." He blew a stream of smoke at the ceiling, squinted up at it." "Where's the best place to pick up his trail?"

"He practically lived in the night spots and upholstered sewers in the Fifties." She checked her watch. "Marty Graham, our night club reporter, can probably give us a steer on it. If we hurry, we can pick him up at the *Cameo* before he gets started on his rounds."

7.

Marty Graham was a thin wiry little man with a thatch of snow-white hair. At the moment, he was relaxed in the heavily padded chair of the barber shop on the third floor of the *Club Cameo*, enjoying his nightly shave. He stared at Liddell through the mirror, pursed his lips.

"What's with you and Lorenzo, Liddell?" His voice was high pitched, his words staccato.

"Just doing a routine check for an insurance company I do some work for, Marty," Liddell shrugged. "Guess they're looking out for an out on the double indemnity clause."

The columnist scowled, shook his head. "I don't get it."

"Neither do I," Liddell grunted. "Maybe they figure if he was loaded and flashing a roll, he asked for the stickup. Contributory negligence. Something like that."

The man in the chair considered it, shook his head. "They haven't got a chance." He permitted the barber to massage his scalp with the tips of his fingers, then tilt the chair back. "Tommy was always loaded — but with dough, not liquor." He subsided while the barber lathered his face, then snaked a hand from under the sheet to wipe some soap from his lips. "So what can I do for you?"

"You ran into him the night he was killed?"

"I ran into him every night. He made the *Silver Swan* around two every night. Running a fever for one of the acts."

"Which one?"

"You kidding? With Denise Lyons around, who'd ever know if there was another broad in the place?"

"Denise Lyons?" Liddell pursed his lips, nodded. "The boy really lived. She share his passion for Tommy Lorenzo?"

"Nobody could match that undying love, but she tolerated him."

"And the night he was killed?"

"Why should that be any different? When Lorenzo owned something he liked to get plenty of mileage out of it." The columnist permitted the barber to push his head

to the side as he started to shave him. "They usually left after the last show, about 2:30. As I remember it, Tommy got it a little after three. This Hollister character must have tailed them right from the joint and took him on as soon as he left Denise at her place."

Liddell nodded, ran the heel of his hand along the side of his jaw. "Sounds kosher enough," he admitted. "It doesn't look like the company has much of a case."

"I told you that in the beginning," Graham told him smugly. He closed his eyes, surrendered to the ministrations of the barber. "Now how about something for the column, Sherlock? What do you hear around?"

"Nothing much, Marty. Anything I hear, I'll give you a ring."

The columnist grunted, appeared to lose interest in the conversation.

An elevator brought Liddell from the third floor to the barroom floor of the converted East Side brownstone that housed the *Club Cameo*. Muggsy Kiely was perched on a barstool at the far end of the bar, talking to the bartender. Liddell joined her, slid onto a barstool at her side.

"Bourbon on the rocks, Leo," he nodded to the bartender.

He waited until the drink was in front of him and the bartender had wandered down toward the other end of the bar.

"Marty have anything to tell you?" Muggsy wanted to know.

Liddell took a swallow out of his glass, nodded. "Lorenzo had a standing date with a canary named Denise Lyons. Know her?"

Muggsy shrugged. "I know who she is. She's got platinum hair and a heart to match — hard, cold and and expensive."

"She still at the Swan?"

"Probably. She seems to go with the lease."

She made concentric circles on the bar with the wet bottom of her glass. "You think she set him up for a kill?"

"That's one of the things I intend to ask her."

Muggsy checked her watch. "We can still catch the early show."

"Good. I'll drop you off, and —"

"Oh, no you don't. After all, I'm the one that set you up with Graham, and where you go, Baby goes."

The *Silver Swan* was a chromium plated double store front on East 68th Street with a multicolored canopy that extended to the curb. As the cab skidded to a stop out front and disgorged Johnny Liddell and the redhead on the sidewalk, a seven-foot giant in the full regalia of an admiral crossed the sidewalk and escorted Muggsy to the huge plate glass doors that opened into the lushly carpeted vestibule.

Liddell pushed a bill through the window to the cabby, followed Muggsy into the dimly-lit interior. A coat check girl wearing the very briefest possible briefs and a peasant blouse full of goodies took Liddell's

hat with a welcoming smile, exchanged it for a check. The tips of her fingers managed to brush his palm in making the exchange. As she walked back into the check room to deposit the hat, her rounded hips worked with exaggerated rhythm against the tightness of her shorts.

A two-hundred-pound fashion plate in a midnight blue tuxedo, a red carnation in his buttonhole, and a lazy smile on his thick lips, greeted them. "You have a reservation, sir?" His eyes flickered over Liddell's business suit.

Liddell shook his head.

The lazy smile turned a little sad. The headwaiter shook his head, disturbing the rolls under his chin. "I'm sorry, sir, but —"

"Tell Carter it's Liddell."

The big man hesitated, then walked over to a phone on the wall near the check room. He pressed one of the buttons in the base, held the receiver to his ear. He murmured into the mouthpiece softly, turned and looked Liddell over, then nodded into the instrument. He replaced the telephone on its hook. There was a dull gleam of perspiration on his upper lip.

"Mr. Carter would like you to be his guest." He worked at the smile, but it had lost some of its easy quality. He snapped his fingers and a uniformed waiter materialized at his elbow. He lifted a menu from the waiter's hand, stepped aside and motioned for Liddell and the redhead to follow him.

He led the way down three red carpeted steps into the main dining room. He skirted the tables that faced the dance floor. They were closely set together, filled with people in evening dress. The one he selected was set back from the floor and sheltered by a large artificial palm.

"Will this be all right?" he asked nervously.

Liddell nodded. "Fine."

The man in the blue tuxedo looked relieved. He signalled for a waiter who was hovering nearby, fussily adjusting his cuffs as Liddell and the redhead got settled.

"Mr. Liddell is the guest of Mr. Carter," the headwaiter told the waiter in a tone that implied that being Mr. Carter's guest was next to being God.

The waiter failed to be impressed, nodded. He waited until the fat man had started picking his way through the tables toward the entrance. "Fat bastard," the waiter commented, with no change of expression. He turned to Liddell, "What'll it be, folks? Caviar and champagne?"

"Two bourbon on the rocks," Liddell told him.

The waiter shook his head. "This I don't get. The boss is going to pick up the check. Me, he picks up my check, it'd be so heavy it'd rupture him." He leaned over, dropped his voice. "You think he couldn't afford it? How about a nice sirloin maybe, about two inches thick —"

"Two bourbon on the rocks."

The waiter broke off, stared at him for a moment, then shrugged, "Me, I'd rupture him," he walked off shaking his head.

"You must know the password," Muggsy grinned. "You sure got action from the Fat Boy. I thought he was going to toss us out at first."

"Carter owes me a couple of favors from away back." Liddell's eyes hopscotched around the room, catalogued the familiar faces at the various tables bordering the floor. "He really gets quite a play here."

Muggsy dug into her oversized bag, came up with a packet of cigarettes, dumped two loose. "This is The Spot for the Cafe Society mob this season. Your girl Denise Lyons is hotter than a fifty-cent pistol right now. Ever catch her act?"

Liddell shook his head. "They don't have a floor show in my favorite Third Avenue hideaway." He squinted into the spotlight, nodded to a table near the entrance. "Isn't that Danny Herrick sitting at the table with the guy with the grey hair?"

Muggsy followed his glance, nodded. "Yeah. The grey-haired guy's name is Mason. Sam Mason. He was Tommy Lorenzo's partner, handled all his investments and stuff."

"What's Herrick doing over on this side of the town? He used to be strictly West Side. Used to peddle muscle for the beer boys. He looks a little out of character in a tuxedo."

Danny Herrick was a heavy-shouldered man with a thick pompadour. His shoulders bulked out the tuxedo jacket, tapered down to a thin waist that gave the effect of an inverted pyramid. From across the room, his face was a pale blur, his heavy beard a dark smudge along the jaw line.

"Lorenzo took him along every place he went. Danny was sort of a glorified boydguard," Muggsy told him. "As I told you, Lorenzo's personality wasn't the kind that helps a guy break a hundred."

"Where was Herrick the night Lorenzo got chilled?"

Muggsy shrugged. "I don't remember that anyone ever asked. I guess maybe Lorenzo didn't feel he needed any help to take Denise Lyons home." She lit a cigarette, leaned back. "Looks like maybe you're going to get a chance to ask him personally."

Across the room, the fat headwaiter had stopped at Herrick's table. He was leaning over the heavy-shouldered man, whispering to him. As Liddell watched, the bodyguard pushed the fat man away, glared across the room. He said something to the white-haired man at his table, pushed back his chair and started for where Liddell sat.

The waiter was back with two drinks. He set them down on the table. "Anything else you want?"

"Yeah, a talk with Denise Lyons. Can you get word back to her?"

The waiter grinned. "This, mister, is definitely not on the house. Caviar,

champagne," he shrugged, "that you can have. The broad?" He shook his head. "This I can't help you with."

"Suppose you leave that up to her. Tell her my name is Johnny Liddell. I want to talk to her about Tommy Lorenzo."

The grin froze on the waiter's face. He looked from Liddell to the redhead and back. "Not without I got word from the boss. Us, we got orders. Nobody but nobody talks to nobody about Tommy Lorenzo. Nobody."

"That makes you smart, meat head," Herrick had come up behind the waiter, his harsh voice made the man jump. "Beat it, I'll take care of this character."

He waited while the waiter backed away, then he pulled out a chair and sat down. "Mind if I join you?"

"Have we got a choice?" Liddell wanted to know.

"No."

"Then be my guest." Liddell looked the big man over, the broken nose, the bulging eyebrows and heavy cheekbones that tagged the professional brawler. "It's been a long time, Herrick."

Herrick twisted his battered features into a glum smile. "Not long enough."

"Last time I saw Herrick, Muggs," Liddell told the redhead, "he was on his way to do a five-year stretch."

"Courtesy of you," the bodyguard growled.

"Maybe we can do it again sometime," Liddell grinned.

"What are you snooping around here for, Liddell? We don't like our star annoyed by peepers. Stay away from her."

"She tell you to tell me that?"

"She don't have to. I'm telling you." Herrick bent the knuckles of his right hand back against his palm, making loud, clicking noises. "So you hustled a free drink. Be satisfied. Drink it and blow."

Liddell took a sip from his glass, studied the other man over the rim. "You don't sound very hospitable, Herrick. Suppose I were to pass up your kind offer?"

"I might have to throw you out."

"So that's what they let you hang around the joint for? A bouncer. In my days that was a job for a man."

The color drained out of Herrick's face, the right end of his lips twitched upwards, baring his teeth. His voice went low, hoarse. "Don't push your luck because the joint's crowded, peeper. A guy named Chink Sherman got his in the *Club Abbey* with every table full."

"That's right, come to think of it. I'm glad you brought it up. I was just thinking — I've got a license for the heater I'm packing. I hope you have too — a guy with your record."

Herrick glared at him, finally dropped his eyes. He pushed back his chair, stalked back across the dance floor, pushing paying customers out of his way.

Muggy released her breath in a soft whistle. "What makes you nee-

dle guys like him, Johnny? That's like playing handball with an atom bomb." She picked up her glass, drained it. "I could use another one of those."

Liddell waved down the waiter, indicated a refill for the two glasses. The waiter shuffled over, looked around and dropped his voice.

"Mister, even if it wasn't on the house, you wouldn't get a check from me. The way you told that gorilla off," he rolled his eyes at the ceiling. "It's better for me than a hot foot bath." He cast a cautious glance over his shoulder.

On the floor, the band blared out an introductory chord and the lights dimmed. A yellow spot probed the semi-darkness, picked up the wasp waisted figure of an effeminate master of ceremonies as he pranced onto the floor. He was tall, thin and had blond wavy hair. From where Liddell sat his shoulders were too wide and his teeth too white to be real.

He was halfway through a tiresome routine of off color jokes and nasal double entendre songs when the waiter showed up with the drinks.

He set them in front of Liddell, dropped his voice, "I got word through to the Lyons broad. That big meatball don't want you to talk to her, that's good enough for me." He straightened up, looked around. "Just so you shouldn't mention who set it up." He backed away, melted into the shadows.

The master of ceremonies had given way to a long line of girls in spangled brassieres and satin pants. They scampered around the floor in what approximated unison, bare legs flashing, bare stomachs undulating. When their number finally came to an end, they ran off the floor and the lights went down.

The sporadic applause died away and an expectant hush seemed to fall over the room. From somewhere, the lisping voice of the master of ceremoniies filled the room.

"And, now, the star of our show — Miss Denise Lyons, Miss Snow Top Herself — the one you've been waiting for."

When the lights went up, a piano had been wheeled to the center of the floor. A tall, voluptuously built platinum blonde stood next to it. Her hair was blue white, complemented by the deep tan of her face and bare shoulders. She wore a daringly décolleté white satin gown that clung to the generous curves, seemed to be having difficulty restraining full, thrusting breasts. A small waist hinted at the full hips, long shapely legs concealed by the fullness of her skirt. Her mouth was a vivid, moist crimson slash in the cocoa color of her face, her eyes were startlingly blue, even at that distance.

The entire room seemed to release its breath in a slow hiss as she started to sway in rhythm with the torch song the band broke into.

Liddell looked from the floor to Muggsy, pursed his lips in a sound-

less whistle. The redhead grinned, leaned across the table and whispered. "Remember what the man said. Private property. You can look but don't touch."

"I don't think I'd have the strength," Liddell grinned ruefully.

The blonde's voice was intimate, sultry. The lyrics of her song were blue and off color, but she managed an expression of untroubled innocence despite the burst of laughter some of the lines drew. At the end of the number, she grinned at the explosion of applause and the scattered wolf calls and permitted herself to be coaxed into an encore.

An adagio team of questionable agility followed her and were almost through their number when a uniformed page boy appeared at the table. "Are you Mr. Liddell?" he wanted to know.

Liddell nodded.

"Miss Lyons will see you in her dressing room," the boy told him. He looked directly at Muggsy. "Alone."

"Don't worry about me, Junior," the redhead purred. "I just come along with him to help him cross the streets."

Liddell grinned at her, drained his glass and set it back on the table. "I told you she was the nervous type."

He followed the page boy around the back of the room to a door leading back stage. The glitter and tinsel of the dining room had no counterpart backstage at the *Silver Swan.* Backstage consisted of a dingy, uncarpeted corridor lined on both sides with doors, and smelled exotically of one part perfume to three parts perspiration.

Denise Lyons' door was identifiable by a peeling gilt star. The page boy rapped at the door, waited expectantly.

"Come on in," a sultry, disturbing voice invited.

She was sitting on a straight backed chair in front of a make-up table. She had exchanged the tight fitting white gown for a light blue dressing gown that made it quite obvious that her assets were as liquid as those of the First National. She grinned at the wide-eyed, slack-lipped stare of the page boy, winked at him. "You remember what I said, Mickey. You come back when you're a big boy." She motioned for Liddell to come in.

When the boy had closed the door behind him, Liddell waited for a moment, then opened the door a crack and satisfied himself the corridor was empty.

The white-haired girl watched with an amused smile. "Cautious, aren't you?" Her full lips were peeled back from a perfect set of teeth. From close, her eyes were a startling blue, crinkled when she smiled.

"I didn't want to be disturbed." Liddell closed the door, faced her.

The girl got out of her chair, motioned him towards it, perched on the edge of her dressing table. "The

message said you wanted to talk about Lorenzo." She twisted her lips as she said it, as though it were a dirty word. "What about him?"

"You were the last one to see him the night he was killed."

Denise shrugged, picked up a cigarette and a long jade lighter. She screwed the cigarette into it, tilted it in the corner of her mouth, and waited for a light. "So?" She turned the full impact of the blue eyes on Liddell as he leaned forward with his lighter. "What's your interest in Lorenzo?"

"I'm a private detective. The insurance company is trying to find a loophole in the double indemnity clause." He picked up a cigarette from the dressing table, smelled it and replaced it. "You ought to try tobacco some time."

Smoke dribbled from the girl's half parted lips. "What's your insurance company trying to prove? That he died of old age?" She watched while he brought a cigarette from his jacket pocket, hung it in the corner of his mouth and lit it. "The police have the whole story. He took me home, left me and on the way he was held up. He must have tried to make a fight of it and the stickup killed him."

"That's the way it's down on the report sheet."

"But?"

Liddell shrugged. "You know that and the cops know that and now I know it. But suppose the killer doesn't." He held up his hand to fend off her interruption. "Maybe he might start getting nervous and decide to get rid of what may be a witness."

The blonde studied him with a half smile, heavily colored lids half masking her eyes. "You sound like a mainliner, Mister. The cops nailed the killer the following day. And they don't have holsters in shrouds."

"Suppose they didn't get the killer? Suppose it was a case of mistaken identity?"

Smoke dribbled from between the blonde's half parted, sensuous lips. "But they did. They found Tommy's wallet on him. How else could he have gotten it?"

Liddell shrugged. "I don't know. But they found another thing that struck me as very interesting. With all the dough Lorenzo was supposed to be packing, they didn't find any money — just the wallet."

"Maybe he had big expenses. Maybe he got rid of it. How do I know, and what do I care?" She frowned at him. "Just what are you trying to prove, Mister?"

"I don't know — yet. When I find out, I'll let you know."

"Do that. Maybe if you keep on this kick you'll be in a position to ask Tommy himself. You're in a good way to be seeing him a lot sooner than I am."

8.

Neither Johnny Liddell nor the blonde heard the dressing room door

open. Danny Herrick's raspy voice broke in. "You sure can't take a hint, can you, Peeper?"

The blonde's eyes flashed fire. Her full lips thinned into an angry line, the color drained from her face, leaving her eye shadow and rouge like angry bruises in the tan. "I told you to knock before you come into my dressing room, Herrick. You're going to pull that stunt once too often."

Herrick didn't take his eyes off Liddell. His right hand was dug into his jacket pocket. "I thought I was doing you a favor. I didn't want this ape to be bothering you."

"Okay. So he's bothering me. And so are you. Get him out of here and you get out with him."

"You heard the lady, shamus," Herrick growled. "Outside." He pulled his hand far enough out of his pocket to reveal that he held a .38. "But first, let's have your iron."

Liddell grinned at him. "You don't think I'd go calling on a lady with a gun?" He permitted the bodyguard to fan him. "If you decide you'd like a little conversation, Denise, I'm in the telephone book."

Herrick leered at the blonde. "Don't count on any conversation with this character, baby. He keeps stepping out of line and the only way you'll be able to reach him is by ouija board." He jabbed the snout of the gun into Liddell's back. "Okay, Buster, do you move under your own power, or do we put you on wheels?"

Liddell led the way through the dressing room door into the malodorous passageway. He started down the corridor toward the door he'd entered, but the gunman stopped him.

"Not that way, peeper. Carter's suddenly got a terrific yen to see you. Sort of for old times' sake." He inclined his head toward the far end of the corridor. Now the .38 was in full view, its ugly little muzzle pointed at a spot about two inches above Liddell's belt buckle.

The private detective walked the length of the corridor, stopped in front of the open cage of a service elevator.

"Let's take a ride," Herrick waved him in with the .38, followed him and punched button 3 on the panel. The cage rocked its wheezy way upward, shuddered to a stop at the third floor and the door scraped open.

A balcony ran from the elevator to a door marked *Private*. It looked down on the main dining room of the *Silver Swan*. The smell of good food, expensive cigars and imported perfumes wafted up from the dance floor. The floor show had apparently finally come to a halt and the band was luring couples onto the floor with the rhythms of a rhumba.

"Carter's waiting, pal, and he don't like to wait." Herrick prodded Liddell in the kidney with the gun, urged him forward.

Inside the private office, Louis Carter sat sprawled in a large leather

overstuffed chair. The room was pine-panelled, softly lighted by indirect fixtures in the wall. A thick rug on the floor muffled sound in the room and the leather furniture and leather topped tables had the soft patina that comes with constant rubbing.

Carter looked up from a fat panatela he was rolling between his thumb and forefinger, grinned at Liddell. The grin faded when he saw the gun in Herrick's hand.

"Why the iron, Danny?" His voice was soft, suave, showed the effects of a determined effort at culture. "I told you to ask Liddell to drop in, not to herd him in with a .38."

"I wasn't taking any chances. I had experience with this guy and there's only one way to handle him. My way." Herrick stuck the .38 in his jacket pocket, stood with his legs planted akimbo, and eyed Liddell belligerently. "The guy's trouble and the way to stop trouble is before it starts."

The smile was back on Carter's face as he turned back to Liddell. He was tall, loose-jointed. His dark hair had receded from his brow to the crown of his head, exposing a freckled pate. The smile cut white trenches into the mahogany of his cheeks. "I heard that you were in the house and I figured it's only neighborly to say 'Hello.' " He stuck the cigar between his teeth, studied Liddell with wary eyes. "You don't get over this way often."

Liddell dropped into a chair, shook his head. "Nice spot you've got, Louis. A long way from that leaky tub in Sheepshead Bay you used to bring the stuff in on."

"A lot's happened since the old days," the night club man sighed. "Some good, some bad." He reached over to a humidor on the table next to him, held up a cigar, drew a shake of the head and dropped it back. "What brings you over this part of the woods tonight, Johnny?"

"I've heard so much about that fireball you've got on the bill, I decided I'd have to see for myself."

Carter laced his fingers across his chest, leaned back. "That's a lot of woman, Johnny. A lot of woman."

"You're telling him?" Herrick growled. "You know where I picked him up? In the broad's dressing room."

Carter's eyebrows raised. "She a friend of yours, Johnny? I never heard her mention your name."

"I never saw her before tonight."

"You're a fast worker. It took me two months to get into her dressing room — and it's my joint." He studied Liddell's face. "What's with you and the broad, Johnny?"

"Just an idea. I thought she might be able to help me in a case I'm working on."

Carter chewed on his cigar, considered it. "She can't." He rolled the cigar in the center of his lips. "I hear you've been asking questions about Tommy Lorenzo?"

"So?"

"We don't like it, Johnny. Denise was Tommy's girl, sure. But we don't want any dead mess stirred up. We've got a business here and getting ourselves smeared all over the papers in the Lorenzo thing isn't going to help our license."

"Maybe Denise doesn't feel that way about it. I hear some entertainers actually hire press agents just to get their names in the paper." Liddell crossed his knees, settled back. "That what you brought me up to tell me?"

"I owe you a favor. You pulled me out of a bad spot a long time ago and I hate to see you stick your head into something." Carter turned to Herrick. "Get a bottle of my private stock out of the locker, Danny. Liddell always had a soft spot for good liquor."

Herrick nodded, crossed the room, slid back a panel that disguised a small built-in bar. He selected an unlabelled bottle from the rack, tilted it over the two glasses, brought them back.

"The blonde wouldn't be private stock, too, Louis?" Liddell wanted to know. Before the night club man could answer, Liddell assured him, "I'm not interested in jumping any claims. All I'm interested in is what happened with Lorenzo the night he got it."

Carter looked pained. "Like I told you, I owe you a big one for what you did for me that night. I'm evening it up by telling you to forget it. Lorenzo got himself mugged and the guy who mugged him didn't make it. So it's closed tight. Let it stay that way."

"Why?"

The smile on Carter's face grew strained. "Take a friend's advice. The guy was strictly no good. Anything or anybody he touched, he loused up. So, okay. Some hood does the city a favor and gets rid of him. Me, I figure the guy deserves a medal. A trigger-happy cop figures differently." He shrugged. "The guy's dead, the cops are satisfied. What's with you all of a sudden?"

"You know the guy who gunned Lorenzo?"

Carter picked up his glass, took a sip, rolled it around on his tongue. "Never heard of him. I read he's an out-of-town gun. From Detroit or one of them towns. I'm not interested."

"He was a hired gun all his life, Louis. Then all of a sudden he pulls a stickup. It doesn't hold water."

"Who says? Joe Louis is a champ all of his life. Now he couldn't get a fight with the worst bum in the business. A guy can't stay on top all the time. Sometimes the breaks are against you."

Liddell tossed off his drink, set the glass down. He pushed himself out of the chair. "We're square, Louis. You don't owe me a thing." He turned his back on Herrick. "I don't know why you're helping to cover up on this deal, but I'll find out."

"You used to be a smart boy,

Johnny." Carter shook his head sadly. "Too smart to fight City Hall. You ought to know you can't win. Lorenzo's dead and it can't happen to a better guy. Go guard tin coffeepots or peek in all the keyholes you want." He jabbed a squat forefinger at Liddell. "You want to stay healthy, stay away from here."

Liddell grinned at him. "That's a hell of a way to build business. And here I was figuring on dropping by to see the show every night. That towhead packs a real wallop."

"So does a .45. That doesn't say you ought to cuddle up with one," Carter snapped. "I tried to do it the easy way, but you like things tough. Okay — you're on your own." He bounced the cigar off the floor angrily. "I don't want you hanging around my joint and the next time I catch you bothering my star I'm going to lower the boom, but good."

Liddell walked over to the arm chair, caught the night club man by the lapels, pulled him to his feet. "I don't like people who threaten me, Louis," he told him softly. "Even when they think they are doing me favors." He pushed him back into the chair, a crumbled heap.

There was a sigh of movement behind him, Liddell ducked away from the vicious blow aimed at the back of his ear. He spun round, came in under Herrick's guard. Instead of moving in where Liddell was waiting the gunman stepped back, pulled the .38 from his pocket. The corner of his mouth twisted upwards, exposing his yellow teeth.

"Suppose we do it my way, sucker," he snarled. "Get those hands on the top of your head."

Liddell's eyes dropped from the gunman's face to where his finger was whitening on the trigger. He laced his fingers at the back of his neck.

"You do a lot of talking, peeper. How would you like to try it with no teeth?" He closed the distance between them, backhanded Liddell across the side of the face.

Liddell started to bring his hands down. The crooked grin twisted Herrick's face, he waited with finger taut on the trigger.

"Cut it out, Danny." Louis Carter got up out of the chair, brushed the wrinkles out of his jacket with the flat of his hand. His eyes were bleak, cold. "You're right, Liddell, we're square now. I don't owe you a thing." He turned to Herrick. "Get him out of here. Nothing happens to him while he's on these premises. You got that? Nothing happens to him while he's in this club."

Liddell grinned at him, caught the night club man by the front of his shirt. He was seeing for the first time how a thin overlay of fat had dulled the menace of the man. A faint film of perspiration glistened on the other man's upper lip. He tried to wiggle free from Liddell's grasp. He tried to match Liddell's stare, had to drop his eyes.

"Don't you worry about looking me up, Louis. I'll be looking you

up one of these days." He pushed the night club man back contemptuously, grinned at the gunman.

He walked to the door, headed for the elevator. It dropped him at the first floor. The headwaiter watched him with stricken eyes as he re-entered the dining room and slid into a chair across from Muggsy.

"Why didn't you take all night? Or is she on a strictly hourly basis?" she snapped. "I hope my being here on a diet of fingernails didn't cause you to rush?"

9.

The telephone on the night table started to shrill. Johnny Liddell groaned and burrowed his head deeper into the pillow but the noise refused to go away. He peered blearily at the clock next to the phone. Its luminescent hands pointed to 3:30. He snaked a hand from under the covers, snagged the phone and held it to his ear.

"Liddell?" a vaguely familiar feminine voice asked.

"Who's this?" he wanted to know.

"Denise Lyons. You were in to see me tonight at the club."

"So?"

There was a faint pause. "You still interested in knowing about what happened to Tommy Lorenzo?"

Liddell sat up in bed, nodded. "Yeah. I sure am."

"How soon can you get over here?"

"Just as long as it takes me to pull on some clothes. Where are you?"

"Gardinet Apartments. 4C. Hurry." The receiver clicked in his ear, the line went dead.

Liddell tossed the receiver back on its hook, slid his legs out of bed and started stuffing them into his trousers. He headed for the bathroom, finished the waking-up process by splashing cold water in his face.

Less than fifteen minutes after the phone had first rung, he was on his way.

The Gardinet Apartments was a huge pile of stone and plate glass that perched over the East River at 51st Street. The expensively decorated lobby was deserted as he walked in. An open self-service elevator stood empty at the rear of the lobby. He plowed through the thick pile of the plush carpeting and pushed the button marked 4.

The elevator whooshed softly upward, deposited him on the fourth floor. Apartment 4C was in the rear of the building. He knocked on the door and waited. When there was no response, he knocked again. This time he heard the soft sound of motion the other side of the door.

The door was pulled open and he had a glimpse of a dimly lighted living room beyond. The platinum blonde was silhouetted in the doorway, the back lighting revealing that she wore little or nothing under the fragile looking peignoir. When she recognized him, she backed into

the room. He had the impression that she had changed her mind about seeing him. He followed her into the room, closed the door behind him.

The girl's hand jumped to her mouth, she tried to swallow her fist. There was a soft swish of motion behind him, Liddell started to spin. He wasn't fast enough.

A heavy blow caught him behind the ear, knocked him to his hands and knees. There was another dull thud and the floor came up and hit him in the face.

Later, a bright burst of pain exploded behind Liddell's eyeballs when he tried to open his eyes. He fought back a wave of nausea, managed to sit up. He was aware of a heavy odor of alcohol, traced it to himself. The front of his shirt was drenched with it, he reeked of it. His eyes persisted in their reluctance to focus and the room spun dizzily.

He closed his eyes, shook his head and took a deep breath. When the room stopped spinning and the floor stopped threatening to come up and hit him in the face, he saw the blonde.

She sprawled on the couch. She no longer wore the peignoir. She was completely naked. One arm was thrown back over the couch, the other dangled to the floor. She sat staring at him with half open eyes. The lush beauty of her face was destroyed by the protruding tongue, by the angry bruise around her throat.

Liddell pulled himself to his feet, tottered over to where she lay. Her flesh was still warm to the touch, but she was dead.

He steadied himself against the couch, explored the tender spot behind his ear with the tips of his fingers. The skin wasn't broken and he thanked his lucky stars he hadn't had time to remove his hat. It had saved him from more serious injury.

Someplace a siren wailed mournfully. The clouds in Liddell's head started to dissipate. He looked down at himself, noticed for the first time that his coat and tie had been removed. He was drenched in liquor. As the picture started to fall into shape, he started to move.

He picked up his jacket and tie from a chair where it had been thrown, shrugged into the jacket. Quickly, he wiped the knobs on the door and started for the bedroom beyond.

Halfway there, he saw the two glasses on the table in front of the dead girl. On a chance, he rushed back and put his fingers on the inside of each glass, spread them out so he could lift the glasses without leaving any mark. He carefully wiped the outside of each glass clean.

From the corridor came sounds of the elevator stopping, its doors being slammed back. Liddell bolted across the room, into the bedroom. He closed the door behind him and headed for the window. A fire escape led to a courtyard below.

He slid up the window, stepped

through to the landing and closed the window. He could hear the pounding on the door to the outside room, started down the fire escape as fast as he could.

He had just reached the first landing when a light went on in the fourth floor bedroom window. He melted back into the shadows and waited. When no head appeared at the window, he dropped from the landing to the courtyard and raced for the doorway to the alley.

He had barely reached the courtyard door when a figure was silhouetted at the window upstairs. There was a shout from above. Liddell ignored it, reached the alley door. He tugged it open and slammed it behind him. There was a series of sharp barks and ugly jagged holes ripped through the planking of the door.

Liddell kept going.

The alley ran into a side street. He debated the advisibility of hailing a cab, decided to put distance between himself and the focal point of the wails and shrieks of the police sirens first.

His first stop was an all-night drug store. He headed for the phone booth despite the unfriendly glares of the night clerk, dialled Muggsy Kiely's apartment. When her sleepy voice finally answered, he gave her no time.

"Muggs, don't even dress. Pull on a coat or something and get over to my place right away."

She started to argue.

"Look, somebody's set me up as a patsy in a kill. I've got to have an alibi. I'll be in my place in about ten minutes if I'm lucky. I'll leave the door open. If I'm in the shower, head for the bed and get into it. I don't know how much time I've got."

He slammed the receiver back on its hook, cut off her startled argument. Then he brushed past the mousy looking clerk, who wrinkled his nose rabbit like at the strong smell of alcohol.

A late cruising cab condescended to be waved down. As it pulled up to the curb, the driver eyed Liddell uncertainly.

"You got dough, bud?" he wanted to know.

Liddell pushed a five through the window at him. "Let's not play twenty questions. Just get me back to the north side of 53rd and Lex." He dropped onto the back seat of the cab, massaged the sore spot on the back of his head.

The cabby grinned his sympathy. "You're going to have quite a head tomorrow, Buster," he grunted.

"Tomorrow's already come," Liddell told him.

At his apartment, Liddell stripped off the whisky-soaked clothes, rolled them in a ball and stuck them in the back of a kitchen cabinet. He shrugged into a bathrobe, headed for a shower, let the boiling hot water wash away the last traces of the whisky odor.

When he emerged from the bath-

room, Muggsy was just closing the door behind her. She wore a camel's hair coat, no stockings, a pair of loafers. Her face was bare of make-up save for a splash of lipstick, her red hair was piled on the top of her head.

"Nice going, Muggs," Liddell grinned at her.

She stared at him, let him take a small overnight bag from her hand, dump its contents into an armchair. Then he snapped the lock on the door.

"Unless this is a brand new technique, I haven't the faintest idea of what I'm doing here, you know," she told him finally. "What's it all about?"

"I'll tell you all about it. First, let's get the coat off." Under the camel's hair coat, she wore only a pair of light blue pajamas, the legs rolled up to her knees. She watched quizzically as he took the coat to the closet, hung it up.

He looked around the room, walked over to the couch, dented the pillows with his fist. Then he walked into the bedroom, brought out a half filled tray of butts, set it down on the coffee table fronting the couch. He stood for a moment, staring around the room, then he scowled at the redhead. "Just one thing more." He walked over to where she stood, slid his arm around her and pulled her close. His mouth found hers, held it for a moment. Then he pulled back, studied her mouth critically. He nodded his approval at the way her lipstick was smudged.

"What is going on?" Muggsy's voice had a querulous note in it.

He took her by the hand and led her to the couch. "I got a call from Denise Lyons at about 3:30. She wanted to see me right away." He reached over, picked two cigarettes from the humidor, lit both and handed one to the girl. "When I got there she was alive —"

The redhead's eyes widened. "She's not now?"

He shook his head. "As I walked into the place, somebody sapped me. When I came to, she was on the couch. Somebody did a good job of strangling her. And I was soaked from head to foot with whisky."

"What a pretty picture for the cops to walk in on."

"With a frame to match. And me sitting dead center." Liddell puffed on the cigarettes. "I just got out of there by the skin of my teeth. But whoever set it up isn't going to be satisfied with that."

"You think he'll set the cops on you here?"

"Yeah. He seems like a public spirited citizen. Always helping the cops. Just like the time he tipped off where to find Larry Hollister."

"The same one?"

"It's got to be, Denise called and told me she was ready to spill everything she knew about Tommy Lorenzo. The killer decided to shut her up and take me out of circulation at the same time."

The redhead's hand shook as she replaced the cigarette between her lips. "Suppose the killer decides to finish up the job right here?"

Liddell's grin was humorless. "I wish he would. But that's not his way. He hires killers or he kills women." He took a long drag on his cigarette, blew the smoke at the ceiling. "I wish he would."

"But why should the cops take some anonymous screwball's word that you were tied up with Denise? After all —"

"They just have to check with Louis Carter down at the *Silver Swan.* He'll be only too glad to tell them I was bothering her tonight in her dressing room. Herrick would only be too glad to swear me into the hot seat." He crushed the cigarette out angrily. "The way it was supposed to work was they were supposed to find me there dead drunk. It may be a little harder this way, but that won't stop them from trying."

Two cigarettes and three of Muggsy Kiely's fingernails later, his prophecy was borne out.

The pounding on the door started like distant thunder, settled down to the chatter of a machine gun. Muggsy caught her lower lip between her teeth, looked from Liddell to the door and back.

"What do we do?" she wanted to know.

"First we smear the lips a little more." He held his mouth to hers, could feel her body quivering against his. "Then, you get into the bathroom."

The pounding on the door showed no signs of abating. Liddell waited until the bathroom door had closed behind the pajamaed figure, then he walked to the door.

"Who is it?"

"Police. Open up."

Liddell pulled the door open. The heavy shouldered form of Ryan, the headquarters detective, stood framed in the doorway. He looked past Liddell into the room. "You took your sweet time about it," he complained. He walked in, kicked the door closed behind him.

"Come in," Liddell grunted at him. He planted himself in front of the detective. "But if you come one step further and you don't happen to have a paper on you, I'm going to throw you right through that door."

The plainclothesman ignored him, his eyes hopscotched around the room, frowned at the feminine clothes scattered on the chairs.

"You alone?" he wanted to know.

Liddell's eyes followed the detective's glance to Muggsy's clothes. "Yeah. When I'm alone I like to walk around in costume. So?"

"Get her out. I have some questions I want to ask her."

"Look, Ryan. You can throw your weight around with —" He broke off as the bathroom door opened and Muggsy walked out.

"What's the matter, Johnny? House detective?"

"Who're you, lady?" Ryan

wanted to know."

"None of your business," Liddell told him. "Okay, you've seen how the other half lives. Now blow."

The headquarters man's eyes flicked back to Liddell. They were bleak, unfriendly. "Look, mister, you're in trouble. Flipping with that big mouth of yours ain't helping a damn bit." He looked back to Muggsy. "How long you been here, lady?"

Muggsy looked to Liddell, shrugged. "What time did we leave the *Silver Swan*, Johnny?"

"Twelve-thirty, maybe."

She smiled at Ryan. "Since twelve-thirty-five, I guess. We came right here."

The headquarters man swore softly under his breath. "Did he leave at any time since then?"

Liddell grinned at him. "You kidding?"

A dull flush crept into Ryan's face, dyed his neck a murky red. "Never mind the funny remarks. The two of you better get some clothes on. The district attorney wants to have a few words with you."

10.

Ryan led the way into a room that bore the legend *Wilson Deats — District Attorney* stencilled on its door in gold. It was a high-ceilinged room that held a peculiar absence of sound when the door closed behind them. The floor was covered with a thick grey-green carpeting, and the leather of the armchairs had been polished to a soft patina. One side of the room was covered with a huge bookcase filled with reference books. In the center, facing the door, a highly polished desk dominated the room.

The district attorney sat behind the desk. He was a broad-shouldered man of nearly fifty, but his hair was thick and black, lacquered into place. His high cheekbones accentuated dark, liquid eyes and a pencil-line mustache separated a full, sensuous mouth from a perfectly chiselled nose. He waved Liddell and the redhead to a chair with a well manicured hand.

"I hope we haven't inconvenienced you." His voice was low, well modulated.

"Oh, no," Liddell grunted. "We're used to being routed out in the middle of the night to answer questions."

Deats looked past Liddell to the headquarters man who had brought them. "I don't think we'll need you right now, Ryan. You can wait outside." He picked up a gold pencil from the desk, fiddled with it until the door had closed behind the plainclothesman. Then the big eyes moved from Liddell to Muggsy and back. "This is very embarrassing, Miss Kiely. I hope you understand it is strictly impersonal."

"What is?" Liddell wanted to know. "We still don't know what we're doing down here, Mr. Deats."

Deats rolled the gold pencil between thumb and forefinger. "You insisted on seeing the singer at the *Silver Swan*, Mr. Liddell. Forced your way in practically, as I understand it. Why?"

"I don't know where you get your information, Mr. Deats, but it's cockeyed. I didn't force my way in, I was invited in."

"What did you discuss with Miss Lyons?"

Liddell smiled at him. "I can't tell you. It was a privileged communication."

Some of the suavity left the district attorney's voice. "I won't take that for an answer, Liddell. No communication is privileged unless—" he broke off, scowled at the private detective, "Are you trying to imply that Denise Lyons was a client?"

"I'm not implying anything. I'm telling you that what she said to me last night was a privileged communication. Ask her."

"Denise Lyons is dead. She was strangled to death in her apartment at about four this morning," Deats snapped. He got up from his chair, stamped over to where the water cooler stood humming to itself against the wall. He drew a drink, drained the paper cup and threw it at a waste basket. "You didn't know that, of course?"

"How could I?" Liddell managed to look shocked.

The district attorney stamped back to his desk. "You realize, of course, that we have other means of checking whether or not Miss Lyons retained your services?"

Liddell shrugged. "Be my guest. Call my office. The retainer came through yesterday morning. Two hundred dollars." He dipped his hand into his pocket, brought up a pack of cigarettes. "My secretary's name is Welch, her home number is Blevin 5-6545." He checked his watch, grinned. "She won't appreciate getting yanked out of bed at this hour, but why should she be an exception?" He held the pack out to Muggsy.

Deats watched while Liddell and the redhead lit up, lifted the receiver off the hook, jabbed at a button on its base. "Call Miss Welch at Blevin 5-6545 and find out if Johnny Liddell was retained by Denise Lyons yesterday morning. Find out what retainer was paid." He slammed the receiver down on its hook.

"So that's why we were brought down here? You thought I was connected with her death?"

"A far-fetched assumption, I'm sure," the district attorney snapped sarcastically. "It just so happens that the person reporting the murder reported seeing a man who fits your description entering Miss Lyons' apartment. He happened to be within earshot when she greeted the caller as Liddell. That was at three o'clock."

"You've got the witness?"

The district attorney smoothed

the hair over his ear with the flat of his hand. "No," he snapped. "He preferred to stay out of it. The implication was that he was visiting somebody in the house not his wife." Deats bounced the gold pencil off the top of the desk. "We're trying to locate him now."

"And on that flimsy evidence, you drag me down here for questioning?"

"Not quite." The district attorney walked to the door, opened it. "Bring in the hat, Ryan."

The headquarters man walked in, closed the door behind him. In his hand, he carried a hat Liddell had no difficulty recognizing as his own.

"Mind trying the hat on?" Deats asked softly.

Liddell shrugged. "What'll it prove?"

The district attorney walked over, leaned his hip against the corner of the desk. "I don't know. You see, this hat was found in the dead woman's apartment. We think the killer might have left it there when he went down the fire escape."

"As a special favor to you." Liddell put the hat on his head, tugged down the brim. It sat high on his head.

"Pull it down in the back," Ryan snapped.

"I can't. It's too small." He winced as the hat bit into the swelling behind his ear.

Deats looked to the plainclothesman with stricken eyes. "It does seem a little small." He took the hat from Liddell's hands, studied the band. "You're denying this is your hat, Liddell?"

Liddell took a deep drag, considered. "I didn't say that. It may be an old one of mine." He blew smoke in twin streams from his nostrils. "I could have left it there before tonight." He looked from Ryan to the district attorney. "I'm not saying it is my hat, but I'm not sure it isn't. Seems to me I used to have a hat like that."

Ryan walked behind Liddell peered at the back of his head. Finally he pushed his head forward. "Here's why the hat sat on the top of his head, Mr. Deats. He's got a goose egg back here the size of a basketball."

"How long have you had that and where did you get it?" Deats wanted to know.

Liddell shrugged, took a last drag on the cigarette and reached forward to crush it out in an ashtray on the desk. "In my business you get paid for the bumps and bruises. You get so you hardly notice them."

"He's one of those peepers who really uses his head," Ryan snapped. "I still think we've got the right guy, Mr. Deats."

Deats pinched at his nostrils with thumb and forefinger. "But he has a witness to his whereabouts at the time the murder was committed." He eyed Muggsy uncomfortably. "A very positive witness."

Muggsy smiled sweetly. "And an

impatient one, Mr. Deats. I don't think I want to stay around any longer. That is, of course, unless you're going to charge me with something?" She got up, walked over to the desk and crushed out her cigarette. "In either case, I demand the right to notify my paper that I'm being held."

Deats sighed unhappily. "Of course, you're free to go at any time you like, Miss Kiely." He turned baleful eyes on Liddell. "However, we're going to ask Mr. Liddell for his co-operation."

"To do what?" Liddell wanted to know.

"To submit to a few tests. Voluntarily, of course."

"And if I refuse?"

Deats looked hurt. "We'll book you on an 1146 and make you wish you had."

Liddell stroked the side of his jaw. "I missed Dragnet last week. What's an 1146?"

"Keeping or maintaining a house of ill fame or assignation of any description for the encouragement or practice by any persons of—"

Liddell cut him off with an upraised palm. "You talked me into it." He looked to where Muggsy stood. "How about Miss Kiely?"

"She's free to go at any time. I'll see that one of the boys drops her off at her place."

"And these tests? What are they?"

"Drunkometer tests. The dead woman and her killer had been doing a lot of drinking. One whole bottle was empty, the other half gone and the place smelled like a bar room." He wrinkled his forehead at Liddell. "Some people can have a snootful and walk like they never had a drink. But they can't fool the drunkometer."

Liddell grinned at him. "Okay, Mr. Deats. I'm your pigeon."

11.

The redheaded secretary looked up from her typing as Liddell pushed his way through the ground glass door into the office. She grinned at the scowl on his face. She swung around on her chair.

"You're getting real famous. The district attorney got me out of bed in the middle of the night to ask me if Denise Lyons was a client. Is she the one who sent the two hundred bucks?"

"No."

"That's what I thought."

"What'd you tell Deats?"

She grinned. "I told him she was a client of ours. I figured it was all right to tell him we got the two hundred bucks from her yesterday morning." She waited until he reached the door to the private office. "Your shadow's in there waiting for you."

Liddell muttered under his breath, pushed open the door. Muggsy was sitting behind the desk with the chair swung around to the window, watching the strollers in Bryant Park, twelve stories below. She spun

around at the sound of the opened door.

"Well, well. I was beginning to be afraid they'd thrown away the key." She watched while he dropped into the customer's chair, stretched his feet out in front of him. "Give you a bad time?"

"Not too bad," he grunted. "But I've got a sneaking feeling they weren't half trying." He popped a cigarette into the corner of his mouth. "That guy Ryan's really out for blood. My blood."

"They give you that drunkometer test?" she asked curiously.

He nodded, touched a match to his cigarette, exhaled through his nostrils. "I could kick myself around the block for leaving my hat there. That's the only thing they've got they can really hang *their* hat on."

"How's that drunkometer thing work?" she wanted to know.

Liddell scowled at her, shrugged. "They make you blow up a balloon. Then they pass the air in the balloon through a mixture of potassium permanganate and sulphuric acid. It's as accurate as a blood test and a lot less messy." He massaged the tender area behind his ear. "I showed up with less than .1%, practically cold sober. The D.A. flipped and told Ryan to kick me out." He took a deep drag on the cigarette, held it between thumb and forefinger, blew a stream of smoke at it. "That doesn't mean they've stopped trying to get me."

"What are you going to do?"

He rolled his eyes up from the cigarette. "What can I do? I've got to get the guy who really did it." He put his head back on the chair, stared up at the ceiling. "Denise was killed because she knew who had Lorenzo killed. So we're right back where we started — only now we have a personal stake in the killer."

"It looks pretty hopeless," Muggsy shook her head.

"I don't know about that. We're pretty certain of one thing. The killer was a man."

"How do you figure that?"

Liddell shrugged. "Women very rarely kill by strangling. Besides, Denise was a pretty big gal — it would take quite a woman to handle her." He rubbed the back of his head. "And no woman handled the sap that put me down."

"Maybe the one who killed Denise was a hired killer. A woman can hire a killer as well as a man."

Liddell considered it, shook his head. "No. Once was enough. Our killer wasn't ready to go up against Tommy Lorenzo, with a bodyguard himself, so he hired a gun. But even there he wasn't too happy to let anyone walk away from knowing he was behind the kill. From now on, he'll handle his own dirty work. Especially if it's a woman."

"It figures," Muggsy conceded. "Who knew about you seeing Denise last night outside of Louis Carter and Herrick?"

Liddell rubbed his chin. "I don't

know. Denise could have gotten in touch with the killer after I left her. Maybe she tried to put the shake to him and when he wouldn't shake she called me. She probably underestimated how desperate he was and overplayed her hand." He got up, took a half filled bottle from the bottom drawer of the desk. He brought two paper cups from the water cooler and spilled a little bourbon into each of the glasses. He handed one to the girl. "You better get on home to sleep. You've had a pretty busy night."

"What about you?"

He tossed off the drink, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "I've got some visiting to do." He crushed the cup into a ball, tossed it at the waste basket. Then, he walked over to a cabinet built into the wall, opened it with a key. He took out a harness and a .45, stripped off his jacket and shrugged into the harness.

"Anybody I know?" The lightness of the redhead's tone was belied by the concern in her eyes.

Liddell checked the magazine in the .45, clipped it into the holster, covered it with his jacket. "Yeah. I figure maybe Herrick and I have a couple of points to cover we didn't get around to last night."

"Give me a for instance."

"He was Tommy Lorenzo's bodyguard. Why wasn't he with him the night he was killed? How come Larry Hollister knew Lorenzo would be alone that night?" He walked back to the desk, recapped the bourbon, put it back in his drawer. "Maybe if he confides in me who suggested that he leave Lorenzo uncovered, we might have something."

Muggsy sipped at her drink, shook her head. "He's not likely to get that confidential, is he?"

"You'd be surprised how persuasive I can get. Especially with people who try to set me up as the patsy in a kill."

After the redhead had left, Liddell walked back to the desk chair, swung it around to the window, braced his feet on the window sill, stared out over 42nd Street.

An hour passed before the telephone on the corner of the desk started to jangle. Liddell dropped his feet from the window sill, spun around in the chair. He lifted the receiver from its hook, held it to his ear.

"Liddell?" The voice on the other end was wheezy, metallic.

"Yeah?"

"I've got some information for you." Liddell could picture the fat man at the other end of the line, his heavy jowls hanging over his collar, his thick red lips pouting. The dummy, dean of New York's beggars, ran a school for beggars on the East side, laid out districts and territories, used his members as thousands of eyes and ears throughout the city.

"You know where Herrick is holed up?" Liddell wanted to know.

The voice on the other end

wheezed. "There was a small fee?"

"A hundred."

"He has a flat in the Village. On Sherman, right across from Nicky Green's Cellar. You know the place."

Liddell nodded. "I know the place."

"He's with a blonde from the *Silver Swan* line. Apartment 2C in number 67."

"Anything else?"

"Yeah. Put the century in the mail before you go down there. He's a bad actor and I don't have that hundred insured."

12.

No. 67 Sherman Place was a two-story nondescript brownstone nestled anonymously in a row of similarly nondescript brownstones. A short flight of steps led from the sidewalk to the vestibule.

Johnny Liddell stopped in front of the shuttered Nicky Green's Cellar, appeared to be studying the fly specked photos in the enclosed glass case next to the entrance. He lit a cigarette, turned, casually studied the front of No. 67. The shades were drawn in all four windows facing the street. Aside from a desultory sprinkling of cars traversing Sherman Place, there was no sign of life.

He flipped the freshly lit cigarette into the gutter, started across the street. He headed directly for No. 67, walked up the short flight of steps, pushed open the street door and stepped into the dimness of the vestibule.

A cardboard sign thumbtacked to the hall door urged "Please Close This Door After You." Whoever had been the last one in apparently didn't believe in signs. Liddell pushed the door open, stepped into the dimness of the hallway.

It was cool and dark inside. The hallway was redolent with odors of ancient cooking and of ageing wood. A worn carpet ran from the door up the stairs to the second floor. Liddell crossed to the stairway, climbed to the upper story. The old house seemed to breathe softly in repose; only the sound of the floor boards crackling under his feet disturbed the quiet.

2C was the rear apartment. He walked to the door, listened for a moment. There was no sound from inside. Liddell tried the knob, found the door locked. He reached up, loosened the .45 in the holster, tapped softly on the door.

There was a pause, then a feminine voice inquired through the panels. "Who is it?" a feminine voice wanted to know.

"I've got a message for Mr. Herrick from Louis Carter," Liddell told her.

The key turned in the lock, the door opened. Liddell pushed it back and stepped in. He closed the door behind him, looked around.

The girl was tall, thin and blonde. She wore a housecoat that was snugged at the waist, billowed at

the hips. Her breasts were big, alive, made their presence known through the housecoat. Blonde hair cascaded down over her shoulders, a discolored welt defaced the left side of her face. She wore no make-up but lipstick, looked to be in the neighborhood of 27.

She backed away as Liddell walked in, her eyes large.

"What do you want?" Her voice was sultry, disturbing.

"Where's Herrick?" Liddell wanted to know.

She nodded her head toward a closed door. "Asleep. He got in late."

"How late?"

The blonde shrugged. "I don't know. I was asleep." Her eyes explored Liddell. "You police?"

He grinned at her. "You know I'm not the police. I'm a private detective. I want to talk to him." He walked past the girl, pushed open the bedroom door.

Herrick lay on his back, his thick hair hanging down over his forehead, his mouth half opened. As Liddell opened the door, the man in the bed rolled over onto his side, grunted in his sleep.

"Wake him up," Liddell told the blonde.

She shrugged, walked over to the bed, shook the sleeping man's shoulder. He grunted twice, opened his eyes. He snarled at the woman, brought his hand back as though to hit her. When he eyes focussed on Liddell standing in the doorway, Herrick's hand streaked for the pillow.

It froze with the tips of his fingers on the butt of a .38 at the sight of the .45 in Liddell's hand.

"Go ahead, tough guy," Liddell told him pleasantly. "Maybe you could make it."

Herrick pulled his hand back from under the pillow as though he had touched a hot iron. He lay there, glaring at the private detective.

"How'd you get here?"

"I followed the smell," Liddell told him. "Get on your feet. You and I have some talking to do."

"I like it here."

Liddell grinned humorlessly. "Maybe I can fix it so's you spend the rest of your life there." The smile faded, a hard note crept into the private detective's voice. "Get out of that bed!"

Herrick tried to meet his glance, couldn't. He swung his bare legs to the floor. "You let him in. I'll fix you for that," he snarled at the blonde.

"Sure, take it out on me. You're so big and tough, why don't you make him eat the gun? You're always telling me how tough you are." She stood, legs akimbo, fists on her hips. "You've fixed me for the last time, Buster. I'm getting out of here. I hope he kills you."

The man on the bed moved with unsuspected speed. He caught the girl by the arm, twisted her around as a shield. With his free hand, he

dug a .38 from under the pillow.

"Okay, shamus, drop the gun. We'll have that little talk, only we'll have it my way." His finger grew white on the trigger. "Drop it or I blast a hole through the broad first and one through you next."

Liddell looked at the white face of the blonde, let the .45 slip from his fingers.

Herrick grunted his satisfaction. "Kick it across the room."

Liddell sent the gun spinning to the far corner of the room.

Herrick pushed the blonde away from him. His left hand described a half arc; he knocked her head to her shoulder, backhanded it into position. "That's just a starter, baby. I got plenty waiting for you." He put his hand against her chest, pushed her backwards. She sprawled over a low stool, fell to the floor, her gown over her hips. She lay there sobbing softly.

Herrick turned his attention to Liddell. "Now it's you and me, shamus." He licked at his lips, showed his right canine when the corner of his mouth tilted up. "Only one of us is going to walk away from this, and I wouldn't start any long stories, if I were you."

From the corner of his eye, he caught the flash of motion as the blonde reached for the low stool. He swung around, raised his elbow to guard his face as the stool streaked for him. It caught him in the shoulder, threw the shot he pegged at the girl out of line.

As the man with the gun staggered, Liddell moved in. He chopped at the gun hand with the side of his hand, the .38 dropped from Herrick's nerveless fingers.

Liddell threw a right to the jaw that crashed through Herrick's defenses, spun him halfway around and bent him over the bottom part of the bed. Liddell caught his shoulder, pulled him around. He hit him flush in the face with a right overhand that seemed to lift the other man right off his feet, dumped him in a heap of arms and legs behind the bed.

The blonde was sitting on the floor, her face in her hands, sobbing. Liddell crossed the room to where his .45 lay, clipped it into his holster, then he walked over to the girl, helped her to her feet.

"You all right?" he wanted to know.

She shook her head angrily. "Just mad. That meatball's been using me for a punching bag ever since I moved in here." There were angry red welts on either cheek.

"Why didn't you get out?"

"I had my reasons."

Liddell nodded. "How long are you out of Detroit?"

The blonde eyed him sulkily. "What do you mean?"

"How long are you out of Detroit?"

She shrugged. "Four months."

Liddell picked up the .38, spun the cylinder, emptied the cartridges. "And Larry Hollister's been dead

five months." He dropped the shells into his pocket, tossed the gun onto the bed. "Coincidence, eh?"

She stared at him hard eyed.

"Look, I'm on your side. Remember? You hired me to do a job for you. At least help me to do it. Was Herrick behind the Lorenzo kill?"

She shook her head. "I'll level with you. I came on here because I had it figured that Larry was knocked off to cover a job he hired out to do. I tried to find out who hired him, but I couldn't. I thought you could."

"Think this guy knows?"

The blonde shrugged. "He was Lorenzo's bodyguard. He was called off that night so Larry could do the job. He must know something."

Liddell nodded. "If he does, I've got a hunch he's on the verge of spilling it. Maybe you'd better get dressed and get out of here. This might not be too pretty."

"With his blood, I'm real brave."

Liddell shrugged. He walked around the bed, caught the unconscious man under the arms, dragged him to a chair. He dumped him onto it. Herrick was a caricature of the dapper man who had swaggered at the *Silver Swan* the previous night.

His pompadour now hung down over his face, one of his eyes was rapidly closing, his head rolled uncontrollably from side to side on top of his body. Pink bubbles continued to form and break in the middle of his mouth.

Liddell buried his fingers in the long hair, pulled the face up. "Can you hear me, Herrick? Who paid you not to be with Lorenzo the night he was killed?"

Herrick gurgled deep in his throat, shook his head.

"Who's paying you now?"

He shook his head again.

"I think Louis Carter has him on the payroll. He's always at the *Swan* and he always has money," the blonde broke in. "He must have something on Louie."

"That it, Herrick?" Liddell shook the head.

"She's lying."

"You put Lorenzo on the spot, didn't you, Herrick?" Liddell demanded. The man in the chair shook his head desperately. "Then why is Carter paying you off? What've you got on him?"

Herrick licked at his lips, weakly wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Carter doesn't own the *Silver Swan*. Lorenzo owned it."

"He's crazy," the blonde snapped.

"Hold it, baby," Liddell told her. "How come nobody knew about it?"

"Lorenzo did a stretch with me in Danbury. He couldn't get a license. Carter barred him one night, so Tommy bought the joint right out from under him. Treated Carter like an office boy. That's the kind of guy he was. A no-good." He made an effort to shake his head loose from Liddell's grip, didn't make it.

"Did Carter have him knocked off to get the joint back?"

"I don't know," Herrick mumbled. "I don't know."

"Who called you off that night?"

"Denise. She told me to make myself scarce, that Tommy wanted for them to be alone."

13.

Louis Carter had the penthouse in the Hotel Stillman on Lexington Avenue in the Fifties. The clerk behind the registration desk raised bored eyes as Johnny Liddell crossed the polished floor of the lobby, went back to his pink edition of the *News*. When Liddell stopped at the desk, he flipped the paper closed with a sigh, rolled the eyes upward.

"Carter. What suite?"

"Penthouse." He nodded toward a bank of elevators. "Last elevator's a penthouse elevator." He plucked at his nostrils with thumb and forefinger. "He expecting you?"

"He will be as soon as you tip him off I'm on the way up."

The clerk smiled drily. "Yeah." He flipped open the newspaper, leered at a Murry Korman photo of Denise Lyons. "He's getting a lot of company today."

Liddell dug a small roll of bills from his pocket, folded one so the *Five* was easily identifiable. "You say Carter's been doing a lot of entertaining, eh? Anyone I know?"

The clerk's eyes dropped to the bill, he licked his lips. "A hard-boiled looking guy with a thick mop of hair. Seen him around a couple of times lately. He came back from the club with Mr. Carter. Left maybe four or four-thirty."

Liddell nodded glumly. "Anybody else?"

The clerk eyed the bill, permitted Liddell to slide it across the counter. "Fellow's up there with him now. Been up there about two hours."

The elevator glided to a smooth stop at the penthouse floor, the doors slid noiselessly open. He crossed to the metal door that had a gilt A stencilled on it, knocked three times. The door opened, Louis Carter stood in the doorway, a glass in hand. He frowned as he recognized Liddell, stood aside and motioned him in.

"You're sure a busy little guy, Liddell," he growled. "I've been reading about you in the papers."

Liddell walked past into the living room. The white-haired man from the club was sitting on the couch, a glass in hand. He swirled the liquid around the side of the glass, studied Liddell wordlessly. He didn't get up.

Carter pointed to a small portable bar that showed signs of having had a busy evening. "Have a drink, if you like."

Liddell shook his head. "Don't I know your friend?" He returned the stare of the man on the couch.

"You probably do," Carter growled. "Sam Mason, Lorenzo's partner. He dropped by when he heard about Denise. We been talking about it. Maybe you can tell us something we didn't know."

"I doubt it." Liddell walked over

to the couch, towered over the man with the glass.

"What a thing to say to a friend," Carter chided him. "Me, I'm tickled to death. I even hope your alibi holds up."

The man on the couch looked puzzled. "If Denise wasn't killed by a would-be lover, who did it?"

"The same guy who knocked off Tommy Lorenzo."

Mason stared at him. "You must be crazy. Tommy was killed by a hold-up man, a fellow named Hollister. The police trapped him at his hotel the next day."

"Suppose Hollister was hired to kill Lorenzo and make it look like a holdup? Then Hollister was put on the spot by the guy who hired him."

Mason and the night club man exchanged glances. Carter tapped his forehead with his index finger. "The guy's flipped." He turned to Liddell. "So why's he kill Denise? Just to keep in practice?"

"No. She knew who he was. She was the one that waved Lorenzo's bodyguard off that night. She helped set it up."

"Who says?"

"Lorenzo's bodyguard, Herrick. I just left him. He did a lot of talking. Real interesting stuff."

"Tell me. I like interesting stuff." Carter's voice carried a new hard note of menace. "What else did Herrick say?"

"He told me you don't own the *Silver Swan*. Lorenzo owned it. He couldn't get a license to run a joint so he bought it out and you fronted for him."

"So what?" Carter's voice was dangerously soft.

"So that might give you a real motive for having Tommy killed. With him out of the way and with the joint in your name, you could take over."

Carter shrugged. "Why should I? Too many people knew. Mason, here, knew. Herrick knew. Denise knew and now you know. I might as well take ads in the evenings rags. I'm too obvious for the killer."

"There was no point in making it public," Mason snorted. "Louis ran the place and made it a paying proposition so I saw no reason why he shouldn't continue to run it. Besides, the moment the word got out that the license was issued to a front it would be cancelled."

Liddell walked over to an armchair facing the couch and sat down. "How about Herrick?"

"The dirty, lying rat," Carter snarled. "He didn't tell you that he had a real good reason for having Tommy killed, did he?"

The white man looked shocked, Liddell looked interested.

"Herrick?" Mason wanted to know. "I thought he and Tommy were very close. Tommy counted on him so."

Carter sneered. "You know where Herrick met up with Lorenzo, Liddell? In the pen. Tommy was doing time in Danbury Federal Pen. Income tax. You knew that?"

Liddell nodded, got a drink.

"Up there, Lorenzo couldn't operate. He's used to buying people one way or another — either with money or having something on them. He picked up Herrick because Herrick could show him how to get the most for his money on the inside."

"That doesn't sound like Herrick had any reason to hate Lorenzo."

"He didn't have." A mirthless smile cut the trenches in the night club man's cheeks. "When he got out, he latched onto Lorenzo as a good thing. He was convinced he'd found a one-man Social Security. He didn't know the way Lorenzo operated."

"How?"

"Tommy wasn't happy unless he had a hold on the people around him. Me, he could toss out of the club like that," he snapped his fingers. "With Herrick it was easy. He left some jewels around and got the goods on him. Good enough to send him back for a long time."

"I never knew that," Mason shook his head. "He never told me."

Liddell dug through his pockets, brought up a battered cigarette, stuck it in the corner of his mouth where it waggled when he talked. "How long have you and Lorenzo been partners, Mason?"

"About four years. Since he got out of the Federal Pen. Up until then I worked for him as his attorney and he wanted to show his appreciation for the way I ran his affairs. So he made me his partner."

"Very lucky for you."

"I guess so," the man on the couch shrugged. He pulled himself to his feet. "I can't stay any longer, Carter. We'll have to finish our conversation some other time."

"Don't let me chase you away, Mason." Liddell swirled the liquor around the glass. He looked at Carter. "I'm afraid it's going to come out about Lorenzo really owning the *Silver Swan*, Louis."

Carter peeled his lips back from his teeth. "You might regret it, Liddell," he said softly.

"Oh, I'm not going to spill." He inclined his head toward Mason. "But he probably will. When they pin the murder rap on him." He smiled at Mason mirthlessly. "You had Lorenzo killed, didn't you, Mason?" Liddell waited.

Mason's hand streaked for his jacket pocket, re-appeared with a snub nosed .38.

"I have a license for this. Ever since Tommy was killed. And I won't hesitate to use it. What are you trying to pull?"

The liquor streaked from the glass in Liddell's hand into the man's face.

As it bit into Mason's eyes, he pawed at them, screaming with pain. Liddell moved in fast, twisted the gun out of the man's hand, kicked it across the room.

"Get a wet towel and wash out his eyes," he snapped at Carter. "I'd better get Homicide up here and get this wrapped up."

14.

Inspector Herlehy stood at the window in his office, stared down at the street below. His hands clasped behind his back, his jaws were beating a powerful tattoo on the ever present wad of gum. He swung around and glared at Liddell who sat in the big armchair across the desk.

The phone buzzed. Herlehy grabbed it, held it to his ear. He nodded, "Send her in." He slammed the receiver back on its hook. "She's on her way in."

Muggsy grinned sweetly at the inspector and widened the grin for Liddell's benefit as she walked in.

"Sit down, Muggsy," Herlehy implored her. "This ape has something on the Lorenzo kill and he wouldn't spill until you got here. I've got a date with the DA in twenty minutes and I've got to have something he can get his teeth into." He glared at Liddell. "Or else this department's got one hell of a false arrest on its hands."

"Who's been arrested?" Muggsy dug into her handbag, brought up a notebook and pencil.

"Sam Mason, Lorenzo's partner," Liddell told her.

"He hasn't been charged. He's just being held for questioning," Herlehy corrected. "Unless this character can come up with something more tangible than guesses."

Liddell nodded. "I can." He got comfortable. "Let's start at the beginning. Lorenzo was a fourteen carat louse. Everybody agreed on that?" He looked around, drew no dissenting votes. "Okay, so the only reason anybody would have anything to do with him is for what they could get out of him. That went for Denise Lyons, it goes for his partner Sam Mason, it goes for Louis Carter, Danny Herrick and all the rest. But while the world hated him, it had to be one of that small gang that set up the murder."

Herlehy picked up a pencil, made some notes on a sheet of paper on his desk. He looked up. "Why?"

"Because it had to be someone close enough to Herrick to be able to call him off the night the kill was arranged."

The inspector considered it, nodded and added to his notes. "Go on."

"We know it wasn't Denise who paid for the kill because she was killed herself by the one behind Lorenzo's murder. So it was either Carter, Mason or Herrick." He dug into his pocket, picked out two cigarettes, lit them and passed one along to the girl. "Who stood the most to gain?" Smoke dribbled from his nostrils. "Carter stood to gain plenty. The *Silver Swan* really belonged to Lorenzo. With him dead, Carter would be able to run it and nobody the wiser."

Herlehy muttered under his breath, made another notation.

"Herrick didn't stand to gain as much. But since he knew about

the real ownership of the *Swan*, he was pretty sure he could cut himself in for a piece. Which he did as soon as Lorenzo was dead. Besides, Lorenzo had enough on Herrick to send him back to jail for a long time." He paused for a moment. "The real gainer by Lorenzo's death, though, was Mason who, as Lorenzo's partner, was probably the only one who knew the real extent of Lorenzo's holdings and who could steal millions without any one being the wiser."

Muggsy tapped at her teeth with the end of her pencil. "You think Lorenzo would trust anybody that far?"

Liddell grinned. "No, but he was pretty sure he could trust Mason. Something happened while Lorenzo was in jail that gave him a stranglehold over Mason, his attorney. When he came out, with typical sadism, Lorenzo named Mason his partner and proceeded to treat him like an office boy."

He took a deep drag on the cigarette, squinted through the swirling smoke as though collecting his ideas. Denise Lyons knew who the real killer was. She had to. The killer told her what night to brush Herrick, he told her where to deliver Tommy for the kill. But she didn't spill. Why?"

Herlehy shrugged. "She was getting paid off, obviously."

"By who? Carter? He didn't have enough to pay her off. Don't forget, he was only an employee. Herrick? He couldn't keep her in shoes. Mason?" He shook his head. "Mason was living on subsistence pay."

"Then why should she get herself involved?"

"Denise Lyons had big plans for Denise Lyons. She wasn't going to be a hip twirler all her life. She wanted to be a lady. And her wandering eye landed on Sam Mason. Take a look at him — Ivy League school, a lawyer. As the surviving partner of Tommy Lorenzo's empire he'd be rich. But most important of all, with what she had on him, he couldn't wiggle out of her clutches."

Herlehy frowned thoughtfully, nodded for Liddell to continue.

"So, Mason started two-timing his boss," Liddell continued. "And that was no way to grow old gracefully. Pretty soon it was getting so obvious that it was only a question of time until Tommy would tumble. And when that happened, it would be curtains for Mason."

"So Mason took out insurance by hiring Hollister to do the job?"

Liddell nodded. "They brought Hollister in from Detroit. Mason told him he wanted to see Lorenzo's wallet as proof that he had done the job. As soon as Hollister contacted him for the payoff, Mason proceeded to double-cross him by sending the cops in shooting. Detective Ryan took care of the only one who could finger Mason for the kill."

"What about Denise Lyons?"

Liddell shrugged. "What about her? Hollister getting himself killed probably put the wind up in her.

By the time she recovered her wits, the cops had closed the case. Mason persuaded her that if she opened her mouth, he'd railroad her to jail. The only reason she's been keeping her mouth shut these past five months is because she hasn't been able to figure where her payoff was coming from."

"But?" Muggsy chain lit a fresh cigarette from the one between her lips.

"When I barged onto the scene and she realized the case was still not closed, she realized she had a brand new bargaining point. She got Mason to her apartment and spelled it out for him. Either wedding bells or she'd sing like a hopped-up canary. When he tried to stall her, she got so mad she called me in front of him, told me to get right on over." He dropped his butt to the floor, crushed it out. "He boobytrapped me and strangled her. Then he tried to make it look as though I'd killed her."

Herlehy looked from one to the other, shook his head. "Is there any of this that can be substantiated?"

Liddell shrugged. "I've got to leave some of it to you, Inspector. There's a babe was shacked up with Herrick who worked in the line at the *Silver Swan*. I'm sure she can back me up that Mason was playing house with Denise behind Tommy's back."

The inspector picked up the pencil, wet the tip on his tongue, scribbled a few lines. "Where in the Village?"

"67 Sherman Place."

Herlehy made the notation. "We'll give Lorenzo's accounts a good going over and if your guess stands up, I think we might be able to find a way of getting Mason to co-operate." His eyes skimmed through his notes and he nodded his satisfaction. "This ought to sell the DA." The phone on his desk shrilled, Herlehy held it to his ear.

The smile drained from his face, leaving a scowl. He glared at the receiver, nodded and slammed it onto its cradle.

"What happened, inspector?" Liddell wanted to know.

"Mason, the no-good rat. He just confessed to the DA's office, and after all the work we did!"

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YOU, detective

11—The Rich Corpse

BY WILSON HARMAN

SERGEANT PHIL HAMMOND shook his head. Without looking at the three people standing huddled at the other end of the long library, he muttered: "It's these simple jobs that always get tough."

"What's that, Sergeant?" Alma Terry asked. Hammond raised his head, looked at her: tall, slim, black-haired; long polished nails almost glittered as she moved her hands.

"Nothing," he said. "Come here."

Miss Terry walked across the room. Freida Kopp followed her timidly, almost a duplicate of her friend: blonde hair, a lighter polish on identically long nails seemed the only differences. Behind them both the dead man's brother walked, small, pudgy and quiet. Hammond looked at them without expression.

"Mr. Grayson," he said at last. "You three were all alone in the house, is that right?"

"That's right," Fred Grayson said quietly, rubbing pudgy hands together. "Just me, and Alma — and Miss Kopp, of course, and — and of course, my brother George."

"Nobody else could have come in?"

"Nobody," Fred said. "Windows closed in this rain . . . doors locked."

"Then George went upstairs," Alma Terry went on rapidly. "He said he had a headache. An hour later we — found him. Fred and I."

"Who went upstairs after George Grayson?" Hammond asked. "One of you strangled him. Who had the opportunity?"

Fred Grayson shook his head.

"Any of us. I don't remember going up . . ."

"Yes, you did," Frieda Kopp said. "You went up to get that book. The one we were discussing."

"That's right," Fred said.

Hammond said: "George Grayson was strangled."

"He wasn't strong," Alma said.

"Very well," Hammond said. "Any of you could have strangled him. The bruises on his throat prove he was murdered, and there's no other mark on his body."

"What was that motive?" Frieda Kopp asked.

"George Grayson held the reins of the family fortune," Hammond said. "His will provides that you — as his fiancee, Miss Terry — inherit half the fortune. His brother, Fred, here, inherits the other half.

"Wouldn't it be simpler," Hammond asked, "to have the money without the husband? And, Miss Kopp, as Fred Grayson's fiancee, you might have liked the idea of Fred's coming into so much money."

Frieda Kopp shook her head. Her hands, long fingernails flashing, went up as if to ward off a blow. "I didn't . . ."

"And I certainly wouldn't have . . ." Alma Terry cut in.

"All right," Hammond said. "We can dispense with the rest of it. Because I know who killed George Grayson."

Contest Winner: YOU, detective

No. 5—THE TIMED MURDER

Mr. Stewart Erney
129 N. Belvidere Avenue
York, Pennsylvania

Sergeant Beal turned to Grace Hendry: "You're under arrest for the murder of your father."

Miss Hendry stiffened. "Everyone heard the fight he had with Mr. Collins," she said quietly. "Maybe he—"

"It was a good idea, Miss Hendry," Beal said, "but Mr. Collins didn't kill your father. The fallen clock was planted — it didn't even scratch the arm of the chair, as it would have if it had really fallen. You placed it there, Miss Hendry, hoping to frame Mr. Collins."

She shook her head. "You can't prove that. Suppose Mrs. Collins had killed my father. She might have —"

"But she didn't," Beal said. "Miss Hendry, when you got to the door of the room you screamed that your father's head had been bashed in. How did you know?"

"I saw it, Sergeant," she said coolly.

"No, you didn't. From the door of this room I could only see your father's legs and lower torso. The only way you could know is if you killed him. The money you would have inherited would be motive enough."

Grace Hendry stood quite still. Sergeant Beal tapped out his pipe, watching her. He put the pipe away and took her out of the silent room.

You Want Her?

Man, it was just the best night ever — until those lousy cops came along.

BY PAT STADLEY

I KEPT WAITING for Bob to hand Sparrow the newspaper. But he was holding it in his hands, waving it around and blowing smoke out his mouth. I wanted to let him have it — right in the face real bad, but Sparrow wouldn't have liked it, so I hung onto my beer.

I wondered what Sparrow would say. He wouldn't take it — not quiet anyway. He'd blow — high, and they'd know. Nobody tells off Sparrow and his Rodders.

It gave me a warm feeling down inside. It ain't everyone that can be a Rodder. You got to be hard — real hard. We wear blue jackets — no name on 'em. Don't need any.

Everybody knows Sparrow. When we walk into a place, people get up and leave — right away, too.

Like last night. There were seven of us. Just tooling around. We saw this little hamburger joint — nice little spot — quiet neighborhood.

Sparrow went in first — like always. Bob behind him, crowding in ahead of me. Sparrow really takes in that place. He looks over to the jukebox, just standing there. Real cool! There's a couple of guys and their chicks, and a few around the game. Sparrow just stands there. We fill in behind him. Nobody says nothing. They look our way and they start to leave. One of them kinda drags his feet and Sparrow just looks at him. He moves real fast and I have to laugh.

The chick he's with gives me a dirty look. Sparrow reaches out and stops her as she goes by. She's plenty stacked.

"Stick around," he says. She gives him the same dirty look and pulls free. We spread out in a line in front of the door and she can't get through. When we get her good and scared, Sparrow kind of laughs and we move aside and she goes out the door — fast.

We play the jukebox and the game, and watch the guy behind the counter until he's so nervous he's dropping things. He knows who we are.

Then Sparrow says, "Let's cut." And I know it's gonna be a cool night. Sparrow's restless.

We tool down to Whitey's and get a couple of fifths. Whitey don't ask questions and pretty soon we're right on top of the Christmas tree.

Bob's driving, waiting for Sparrow to say where. Then we see the '41 Ford cut in front of us and it's full of '39ers. They're heading for the Rink and we park right behind 'em. There's five of 'em and they climb out of the car all on one side.

We just sit there enjoying this. We got a score to settle and it ain't often you find just five of them together.

Sparrow gets out first. They don't jump him. They know who he is. He stands there loose and easy. I get out on the other side and we form a ring around them. I'm waiting for Sparrow to move when I see the cop car. It swings our way, lights spilling over us. Sparrow leans back against the car. He pulls a cigarette out. Bob turns the radio on real loud and the music comes out — solid.

The '39ers relax. Grins all over their faces. One of them flicks his cigarette down at Sparrow's feet. "See you later," he says.

The cops don't get out. They just sit in their car and we watch the '39ers walk by them and on into the rink.

We climb back into the car. Bob pulls out slow and easy. The cops sit there watching us. I had to laugh, but Sparrow's mad. I can tell the way he's finishing the bottle.

"Lousy cops," he says, and he heaves the bottle out. It sails across

the sidewalk, smashes into a window. He laughs suddenly, picks up a full beer can and motions Bob over to the sidewalk. People just stare. He leans out the window.

"Lousy cops," he yells and he heaves another. This takes a large plate glass in a big furniture store. It sounds like ice all smashing up.

We all grab a can. Bob rocks down the street. People stare at us, pointing. I throw a half open can. The beer spills all over them. Bob guns the motor and we go down a side street, across to Green and then straight up to Orange Grove. There's not a copper in sight.

I'm thirsty. We pull into Mickey's and we sit around the juke box and we're all feeling real good.

It's midnight. "Let's cut," Sparrow says. We go out to the car. "I'm gonna take one," he says.

We're headed for Green again, slow and easy. An MG pulls in front of us. There's a guy and a chick in the car. It's quiet on the street.

"Let's look her over," Sparrow says. Bob runs them right into the curb. The chick's really screaming when I pull her out of the car. I have to slap her hard. The guy's got a monkey wrench in his hand. But he don't last long.

The chick's quit squirming. She's slumped against me. I give her another one across the face and she wakes up. She's really scared now. Sparrow don't even look at her. "You want her?" I ask.

He still don't look her way. I twist her around to face me and hold her still. She don't scream. She's too scared. I look at Sparrow. "How about it?" I ask him.

He waits a minute, turning to look at her. Then he says, "Okay. Let's go." He grabs her and she screams again and tries to get away. But she's not going nowhere except down.

After a while I take over. She's not screaming now and she don't fight back so hard.

Then we leave her there. All this time, the guy doesn't move. He got hit good.

When we cut out, Bob turns the radio on. It's loud and solid. Sparrow sits there snapping his fingers. It was real good. It was the best yet.

And now I wanted Sparrow to see that morning paper. I couldn't wait no longer. "Give it to him, Bob," I say.

He hands the paper to Sparrow. Sparrow spreads it out on the table and reads the headlines. "Police Chief warns teenage hoodlums to stay out of his town."

His town! I got to laugh at that.

Sparrow reads it all and then he just sits there. "Tonight," he says, slow and snapping his fingers, "we'll get us a copper."

I listen to him, my insides tight and warm. It was going to be a cool night. Maybe even the best yet.

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A blonde offers Perry $1500 to get back her clothes and car, stolen while she was sunbathing. Then the police arrest her for murder. They claim the killer is either Perry's client—or *Perry!*

2 THE CASE OF THE GLAMOROUS GHOST

Perry's client doesn't remember what happened the night her husband was murdered. She can't recognize her own .38 — the murder weapon. Only two people can clear her. One is missing — the other is *dead!*

3 THE CASE OF THE RESTLESS REDHEAD

Mason's client is accused of stealing $40,000 in jewels. Then they accuse her of *MURDER!* Perry must save her—though he suspects she may be *guilty!*

4 THE CASE OF THE FUGITIVE NURSE

Perry sneaks into an apartment; finds an *empty* safe. Then a blonde *slams the safe shut.* Not sinister . . . *except* that the *tenant* had been MURDERED!

5 THE CASE OF THE RUNAWAY CORPSE

A client hires Mason to get a letter accusing her of planning to poison her husband. Perry finds *blank* paper! Police say Perry hid the REAL letter!

6 THE CASE OF THE GREEN-EYED SISTER

Grogan, a blackmailer, wants $20,000 for a piece of evidence against Fritch. Then Fritch is found DEAD! Grogan has an alibi—but not Mason!

—SEE OTHER SIDE

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